

2003

# A Qualitative Exploration of White Women in Historically Black Sororities at Predominately White Institutions in the Midwest

Mary L. Bankhead

*Eastern Illinois University*

This research is a product of the graduate program in [College Student Affairs](#) at Eastern Illinois University.

[Find out more](#) about the program.

---

## Recommended Citation

Bankhead, Mary L., "A Qualitative Exploration of White Women in Historically Black Sororities at Predominately White Institutions in the Midwest" (2003). *Masters Theses*. 1485.

<https://thekeep.eiu.edu/theses/1485>

This is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Theses & Publications at The Keep. It has been accepted for inclusion in Masters Theses by an authorized administrator of The Keep. For more information, please contact [tabruns@eiu.edu](mailto:tabruns@eiu.edu).

## THESIS/FIELD EXPERIENCE PAPER REPRODUCTION CERTIFICATE

TO: Graduate Degree Candidates (who have written formal theses)

SUBJECT: Permission to Reproduce Theses

The University Library is receiving a number of request from other institutions asking permission to reproduce dissertations for inclusion in their library holdings. Although no copyright laws are involved, we feel that professional courtesy demands that permission be obtained from the author before we allow these to be copied.

PLEASE SIGN ONE OF THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS:

Booth Library of Eastern Illinois University has my permission to lend my thesis to a reputable college or university for the purpose of copying it for inclusion in that institution's library or research holdings.

AUTHOR'S SIGNATURE

1 AUGUST 2003  
Date

I respectfully request Booth Library of Eastern Illinois University **NOT** allow my thesis to be reproduced because:

---

---

---

Author's Signature

Date

A QUALITATIVE EXPLORATION OF WHITE WOMEN IN  
HISTORICALLY BLACK SORORITIES AT PREDOMINATELY  
WHITE INSTITUTIONS IN THE MIDWEST

BY

MARY L. BANKHEAD

**THESIS**

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF SCIENCE, COLLEGE STUDENT AFFAIRS

IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY  
CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS

2003

I HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THIS THESIS BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING  
THIS PART OF THE GRADUATE DEGREE CITED ABOVE

8-01-03  
DATE

8-01-03  
DATE

THESIS DIRECTOR

DEPARTMENT/SCHOOL HEAD

Mary L. Bankhead

©2003



## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative study was to identify factors that influence White women's participation in historically Black sororities at predominately White universities in the Midwest and secondarily examine their overall sorority experiences. Four White female participants were utilized who were either a) members of international university-recognized sororities governed under the auspices of the NPHC or b) were members of international university-recognized sororities governed by the NPHC during their undergraduate years.

Results from this study indicate the quality of sisterhood, existing chapter diversity, positive experiences with members and non-members, a shared value system with the sorority, and an aversion to National Panhellenic Conference member organizations influenced the participant's desire for membership in historically Black sororities. Additionally, two factors were discussed that presented perceived barriers to White women's participation in historically Black sororities: 1) membership questioned from outside the chapter and 2) feeling the need to prove oneself. According to the participants, they were highly involved, dedicated, and dependable members of historically Black sororities which in turn played an important role in their academic, social, and professional lives of the participants.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many individuals have been by my side helping my thesis come to fruition. So many people have been cheerleaders for my team, motivating and encouraging me with their thoughtful words of wisdom, ideas and suggestions to improve my thesis, and inquiring about my progress. I am so truly grateful and forever indebted to the many hands, hearts, and brains that helped mold this project to what it has become.

First and foremost I want to give thanks to the Lord because without Him, there is no me. I have been blessed many, many times. The Lord has opened up the door of opportunity to me and shut the door of negativity. I feel I am truly blessed and it is all because of Him.

Dr. Richard L. Roberts, my thesis chair, I am so appreciative of all of the encouragement, confidence, and patience you gave me from the beginning to the culmination of this project. I know that there were many times that we hit roadblocks, but, with your help, we able to overcome and surpass them all.

Dr. Charles G. Eberly, my committee member, professor, advisor, mentor, and, most importantly, friend. I cannot put into words how much I learned from you and all of your "bird walking." I will never forget the many late evenings you sacrificed in order to help me complete this project. You have truly made a lasting impression on me. I hope that I inspire, motivate, and educate my future students as much as you have for me. If I only achieve 1% of all that you have done, then I will have done plenty.

Dr. James A. Wallace, I will never forget our many life talks before, after, and during class. You have truly affected me personally, professionally, and academically. Thank you so very much for challenging me for my entire graduate career. It has been

people like you that encourage and motivate others to do their very best. And thanks for taking me to Wal-Mart!

Jack R. Trump, my thesis buddy and partner-in-crime, I am so very glad that we were able to attend graduate school together, even though we did not plan it that way! I feel truly blessed that you are part of my life. I am saddened yet elated as our time together comes to a close. As we both move on to the next part of our lives, let us not forget our time at Eastern.

Jamill L. Taylor, my thesis buddy and "Miss Daisy," you do not understand how happy I was when you walked into class back in 2001. I have seen you grow so much and am happy that I have been able to be apart of your life. As we separate, we cannot forget our time at EIU, always having each other's back. Friendships like ours withstand time and distance. Girl, next time, Roadhouse is on me!

Dr. Barbara Powell, my research methods professor, without you and your wonderful teaching methods, I would not have grown to love researching as much as I do. Your constant words of encouragement are always appreciated. The confidence you have in me sometimes amazes me. Thank you so much for all of your help and help.

Cindy Boyer, my wonderful supervisor and friend who never ceases to amaze me. When you first joined the staff, I was really apprehensive because I did not know what to expect. Looking back, my fears were just plain silly! Thank you so much for being there for me, always having a shoulder to cry and taking the time to listen to me. You are definitely the type of supervisor I want to be.

Charity Mouck was my first Student Affairs supervisor and truly has passion and sincerity for students. Having experienced graduate school, graduate assistantships, and the life of being a graduate student, I have even more appreciation and gratitude for all that you were able to do as my supervisor. Without you and your unbelievable role modeling, I would not be in Student Affairs.

Dr. Heather M. Pleasants, my McNair faculty mentor, was a catalyst in my development as a young professional, Black woman. Thank you so very much for making me take a look deep inside myself and understanding the importance of having self-pride.

Erica, Evette, and Eddie, my loving siblings, who have been there for me through the toughest of times. Family is SO very important and I feel extremely blessed because my family is supportive, encouraging, and motivating of everything that I do and always, always by my side.

Tharon, Dominique, Deondria, Jasmine, Erica, Robin, and Jaylen, my incredible nieces and nephews, are so beautiful and a true inspiration in life. You are growing up so quickly and becoming outstanding young adults. I hope you all will have the thirst for education, understand the importance of family and community, and desire to experience as we all do.

Craig S. Majors, my life partner, who, although did always understand what I was going through with the project, but, nonetheless, stood steadfast next to me. You have been my rock so many times, even if you did not agree with what I was doing. I sometimes find it hard to believe that God has blessed me so much by putting you in my life. Thanks so much for being there for me--telling me a joke, singing a song, or just

listening to make me feel better. No distance can keep us apart. I love you. Don't ever forget that.

Last, but most definitely not least, I would like to acknowledge the Study Participants who open their doors and lives to me. Without them, this study would not be. Thank you all so much for sharing so much with me.

## DEDICATION

## For Mama and Daddy

Mama, your spirit will live on through all that we do. I know that you are watching over me, making sure that I don't mess up—or at least not too bad. There is not a day that goes by that I don't think about you. You will never be forgotten. I love you.

Daddy, you stepped up and were “Mama and Daddy” for me and I am forever grateful for that. You are an “Old School” conservative, I’m definitely a “New School” liberal, and sometimes we do not see eye-to-eye. But never forget that I am, and always will be, your little Sweetpea. I love you.

## PROLOGUE

*"I LOVE MY 'S' IN FRONT OF MY 'G', MY 'G' IN FRONT..." "S-I-G-M-A, G-A-M-M..." "ALL OF MY LOVE, PEACE, AND HAPPINESS BELONG TO MY SIGMA!"*

*Ah, yes, the good ol' Sigma chants that resonate throughout an entire room. After a culmination of a weekend's worth of planning, meeting, updating, and confronting (in sisterly ways, of course), Central Region Conference attendees were, in essence, "awarded" with a stepshow and party. With the stepshow being brief in exhibition, the Central Region Sigma party began soon after. Being not the most rhythmically inclined soror in attendance as well as not having any true interest in strolling, I opted to hit the sidelines. There, I would be able to people watch, or in this case soror watch, with ease. As I soror watched, I was easily able to ascertain the differences between the chapters (e.g. which ones had frivolously spent money to get matching shirts, which ones had cookie cutter sorors with all members looking the same, which chapters extensively practiced strolling so that they would shine, which chapters were buckwild and those which were not, etc.). As I peered through the many sorors doing their "thang," I noticed a White woman across the room. "She couldn't possibly be a soror," I thought to myself as I assumed that my chapter's co-advisor was the only White Sigma woman in the entire Sisterhood. Intrigued, I decided to make my way over to "this White woman" in attendance at our party in order to get a view of this "anomaly." As I neared "Suzy," she turned away from me, but I noticed that she was wearing my colors, royal blue and antique gold. "Now," I think to myself, "this chick must be out of her ever-loving mind! How is a 'wannabe' going to come into our party and wear our colors?!" I got within three feet of "Suzy" and got a closer look, and*

*there they were—my letters across her chest! What? “Suzy” then turned around as I assume she felt my eyes burning holes into the back of her head. “Hi, soror,” she said smiling ever so gently, exuding all of the pride and love we Sigma women do. “Hello, ssssoror,” I said back to her, stumbling over the ‘s’ in soror. Soror “Suzy” continued to smile with me until she saw her stroll line come around and hopped on it, right on beat and in step. Astonished, I returned to the wall and continued to watch Soror “Suzy” stroll and dance and smile and, basically, have a good Sigma time, all night long. As I watched her do her “thang,” the sense of astonishment I had faded into a sense of pride. Here is this woman who loves and adores and reveres Sigma just as I do. She obviously must be a strong, courageous woman. She must have the aforementioned qualities and characteristics as she followed her heart and did what was best for her even though she came into Sigma Land knowing she could receive criticism from her family, friends, other Greeks...her sorors. With this thought, I smiled to myself almost laughing at my sheer stupidity and ignorance. Who was “this White woman” in attendance? She was a soror, my Sigma soror.*



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT .....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	iv
DEDICATION.....	viii
PROLOGUE .....	ix
TABLE OF CONTENTS .....	xi
CHAPTER	
I. INTRODUCTION .....	1
Purpose of Study.....	6
Research Questions .....	7
Significance of the Study .....	7
Limitations of the Study .....	8
Definition of Terms .....	9
Overview.....	11
II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE .....	12
History of Black Greek Letter Organizations.....	12
Co-curricular Involvement.....	15
Differences between Black and White Greek Systems.....	18
Summary of Literature.....	22
III. METHODOLOGY .....	25
Setting .....	26
Participants .....	26
Instrumentation.....	27
Data Collection .....	28
Treatment of Data .....	29
IV. RESULTS .....	31
Research Question One: What factors influence the decision of White women to join historically Black sororities? .....	31

Research Question Two: What are perceived barriers that exist for White women's participation in historically Black sororities?.....	39
Research Question Three: How do White women who are members of historically Black sororities describe their experience?.....	41
Research Question Four: What role do historically Black sororities play in the academic, social, and professional lives of their White members?.....	46
Summary of Results.....	54
 V. DISCUSSION .....	57
Significance of Results.....	57
Limitations and Recommendations.....	65
Conclusions.....	67
REFERENCES .....	70
APPENDIXES .....	75
A. Informed Consent Form.....	76
B. Interview Guide Protocol.....	78
C. Call for Information Email .....	81

## CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

The demographic of today's colleges and universities differs greatly from the time when Harvard first opened its doors in 1636. Although earlier times were more homogeneous, the current higher educational system has evolved so the campuses and students are more diverse than ever. Although this diversity includes many factors such as gender, sexuality, and abilities, it especially has changed racially. People of color are growing at a significant rate in the United States (Boschini, 1998). Boschini (1998) speculated that between 1990 and 2030, the population of Whites in the United States will increase about 25.0 percent, the African American population about 68.0 percent, the Asian American, Pacific Island American and the American Indian population about 79.0 percent, and the Hispanic population about 187.0 percent.

Although the university atmosphere continues to become more diverse, little has changed among Greek letter organizations with membership demographics remaining largely unaffected from the time of their inception. Homogeneity of members has existed since Greek letter organizations' earliest beginnings. The first Greek letter organization was founded in 1776 as Phi Beta Kappa (Boschini, 1998). According to Thompson (2000), Phi Beta Kappa's distinguishing characteristics were "a motto, a grip, a ritual, and oaths of fidelity, high idealism, and foundation based on service and friendship" (p. 19). The majority of successive fraternal organizations has adopted these characteristics. At the time of inception, Phi Beta Kappa had a vision to be a national fraternal organization. Today, it has over 200 chapters across the country (Thompson, 2000). In the years that followed the creation of Phi Beta Kappa, the

country saw the birth of many other fraternal organizations. Since student groups reflect the population in which they exist, fraternities and sororities of the era were mainly composed of Whites and Christians.

From their inception, fraternities received, and continue to receive, criticism for being elitist, exclusive entities. According to Lee (1955), the issue of the stringent restrictions for membership selection based upon racial and religious presupposition and was in dire need of discussion. In addition, Lee (1955) stated, "The chief defect of 'Aryanism', the acceptance and rejection of persons for membership on grounds of race, religion, and nationality, was prevalent in social fraternities" (p. ix). Lee (1955) further hypothesized,

If men and women['] social fraternities and sororities will rid themselves of this disastrous theory and practice (Aryanism), they can contribute greatly to the development of democratic leadership. The crucial problem facing men and women's fraternities is not scholarship or hazing or wild parties but self-segregation; segregation on the basis of race, ethnic origin, and religion (p. 3).

Lord (1987) argued that, "Any group that sets itself up as elite, discriminates on the basis of race, religion and gender... seems less likely than other campus clubs to promote sympathy between individuals of different race, religion, and sex" (p. 10).

In reaction to this, Black Greek letter organizations (BGLOs) were founded so that students of color could be unified and support each other academically and emotionally. Black Greek letter organizations also provided a social outlet for students of color. McKee (1987) noted the original purpose of Black Greek letter organizations was to provide Black students with academic assistance by means of study and tutorial

groups, positive role models, as well as a social support network. Black Greek letter organizations were also created partly in response to Black students' exclusion from White social Greek letter fraternities and sororities at predominately White colleges and universities. "As minority-group members began to attend American colleges in greater numbers, one of their first reactions to the generally exclusionist practices of fraternities was to set up their own minority group (Lee, 1955, p. 20)." During the early 1900s, when eight of the nine major historically Black Greek letter organizations were founded, students at predominately White campuses were divided not only on the basis of race, but also by social barriers of class (National Pan-Hellenic Council, n.d.)

With these issues rampant on campuses nationwide, African-American students devised plans to align themselves with other individuals sharing common goals and ideals. It was within this cultural milieu that the African American Greek-lettered organization movement facilitated brotherhood and sisterhood and pursued social change through the development of social programs that would create positive change for Blacks and the country (National Pan-Hellenic Council, n.d.).

If fraternities are to have a future in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, they must attract their fair share of minorities (Manley, 1990; Tucker, 1983). Fraternity chapters on a particular campus can reflect the ethnic composition of the campus, except on those campuses where there are strong ethnic minority fraternities that absorb the fraternity-inclined students of the particular ethnic group that has produced the ethnic fraternity. And even ethnic fraternities have to face the reality that the future is not what it used to be—they, too, may need to embrace greater ethnic diversity (Manley, 1990). McKee (1987)

warned that if fraternities and sororities do not take steps now to seriously address the issues of racial segregation, they might find themselves faced with the abolition of the entire Greek system on some campuses. Diversity reaps positive results within individual chapters (Lord, 1987). If Greek letter organizations expect to survive and flourish into the next century, it is imperative that they understand the importance of diversity.

Why should Greeks be concerned with or even care about diversity? Manley (1990) proposed that diversity and multiculturalism should be embraced and encouraged within all organizations.

Ethnic diversity is not a question of civil rights. Nor is it a question of abandoning exclusivity; it is not a question of breaking down ethnic barriers; it is not a question of affirmative action. The fact of the matter is that the question of ethnic diversity is simply a question of facing the reality of the future in a dignified and intelligent way (p. 31).

Boschini (1998) asserted four main points as to why the Greek community should be and must be concerned with diversity within membership.

First, fraternities and sororities were founded on principles of friendship, scholarship, leadership, rectitude, and service. The expansion of fraternity and sorority membership to more students who share the organization's values can enhance the Greek experience for all members. Second, diverse memberships expand the educational and learning opportunities among and between fraternity and sorority members of different cultures, abilities, and backgrounds. Diversity in organizations helps prepare members for working and living in a highly

diverse society. Third, the traditional-aged White student will become the minority on campuses in the next fifteen years. To remain healthy and viable, fraternities and sororities must actively seek members from within a diverse student body. The groups that do not expand their membership pool will not survive. At best, these groups will become small organizations with little impact on campus student life. Fourth, fraternities and sororities espouse values of brotherhood, sisterhood, and community. The Greek community, however, cannot exist apart from, or in opposition to, the college or university community. To continue to be part of the college community, Greek letter organizations must conduct themselves according to these goals. Thus, it is clear why Greek letter organizations should be concerned about diversity. The learning and success of student members, as well as the survival of Greek organizations and the college community, depend on it (p.21)

Greek organizations are sometimes the most dominant student organizations on campus. Although Greek organizations are not new to today's college campus, research involving Greek organizations continues to evolve. Research conducted over the past thirty years on Greek organizations has been modest and primarily directed at National Panhellenic Conference (NPC) and National Interfraternity Conference (NIC) member organizations (Thompson, 2000). Little research has been completed toward National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC) member organizations. The research that has been completed on historically Black fraternities and sororities has focused on Black students at historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs.) Very little published research to date has focused on the experiences of students of color in historically Black



fraternities and sororities at predominately White institutions. Furthermore, there has been no research published to date that focused on White student participation in historically Black fraternities and sororities at predominately White institutions.

### Purpose of the Study

Because college demographics continue to change, the need for this research is critical. Not unlike other segments of the university community, such as academic departments, faculty, and campus leadership, Greek organizations need to be educated about how student characteristics are changing (Boschini, 1998). It is imperative for Student Affairs professionals to know the extent of the similarities and differences between Black and White Greeks on the contemporary college campus, and in higher education in general. If higher education professionals are to gain a comprehensive understanding of their students, then there must be careful study surrounding the many different, changing demographics pertaining to student populations. If Greek organizations are to serve as a partner in the academic experience, then there must be careful study of the factors that influence student participation. If Student Affairs professionals are ever to be successful in bringing about more cooperation and involvement between Black and White Greek groups, the Student Affairs professionals must be actively involved in improving racial integration within chapters. Higher education professionals must also reduce and eventually eliminate hazing, alcohol and other drug and substance abuse, sexism, and racism within organizations as well as improve racial harmony on campuses and in college communities (Whipple, Baier, & Grady, 1991).



Therefore, the following study was designed to add to the body of knowledge in this important area. The study was designed to identify factors that influence White women's participation in historically Black sororities at predominately White universities in the Midwest. A secondary goal of the present study was to understand the study participants' experiences in their respective sororities.

### Research Questions

The following research questions were addressed in order to determine factors, barriers, experiences and roles of sororities in White women's lives.

1. What factors influence the decision of White women to join historically Black sororities?
2. What are perceived barriers that exist for White women's participation in historically Black sororities?
3. How do White women who are members of historically Black sororities describe their experience?
4. What role do historically Black sororities play in the academic, social, and professional lives of their White members?

### Significance of the Study

Much research has been conducted in relation to fraternity and sorority life. However, minimal research exists on historically Black fraternities and sororities (Thompson, 2000). Further, the majority of research that has been conducted in relation to historically Black fraternities and sororities has been focused on the Black student membership of these organizations (Thompson, 2000). According to Thompson (2000), previous researchers have examined Black students in historically Black Greek

organizations in the following areas: (a) values and attitudes (Sedlacek, 1987; Whipple, Baier, & Grady, 1991; Winston, Nettles, & Oppen, 1987); (b) social action (McKenzie, 1990); (c) the role of Black Greek organizations on predominately White campuses (Daniel, 1976); and (d) leadership, social, and personal development (Miller, 1973). Virtually no research exists pertaining to the ethnicity and racial demographics of historically Black Greek-letter organizations. Limited amounts of research and statistical data pertaining to, either directly or indirectly, the non-African American membership of historically Black fraternities and sororities has prompted the development of this study. The researcher developed the study to be exploratory utilizing rich, descriptive verbal responses from the study participants.

#### Limitations of the Study

Qualitative study is by nature problematic concerning sample, control and issues such as reliability and validity. For instance, as with all qualitative studies, this project was limited by the sensitivity and integrity of the investigator. The researcher's own experience both as a Black woman and sorority member may have made unbiased investigation difficult. Likewise, the participants' awareness of the researcher's sorority affiliation may have made some participants hesitant to answer with complete candor during the interview session. The study participants' previous interaction with or knowledge of the investigator could possibly inhibit or encourage responses. It is also important to note that this study is representative only of the four participants and their respective experiences. Therefore, the results of this study should not be generalized to all White women in historically Black sororities. Lastly, issues such as reliability, validity and generalizability are factors given the nature of this type of study. Rigor

was attempted through typical qualitative techniques such as data collection and interpretation.

### Definition of Terms

This study utilizes several terms that necessitate definition. The terms are defined as follows:

**African-American/Black** is not limited to the politically imposed and socially constructed boundaries of the US but includes all peoples whose legacy is linked to that of original African peoples (A. T. Buissereth, personal communication, August 28, 2002). The terms Black and African-American are used interchangeably in the study. In the context of the present study, being Black or White is more than simply belonging to an ethnic or racial group. For these reasons, the initial letters in the terms Black and White are capitalized.

**Black Greek letter organization (BGLO)/Historically Black fraternities and sororities** refer to the social Greek organizations that were founded at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when Black students were denied membership in the existing Greek-letter organizations. The term BGLO also refers to the Greek organizations governed under the auspices of the National Pan-Hellenic Council.

**College Panhellenic (CPH)** refers to the student governing association of the women's National Panhellenic Conference sororities on the campus.

**Co-curricular/Extra-curricular activity** refers to any student activity, aside from the regular curricular program, which has organized purpose and which requires some degree of time, energy, and initiative on the part of the individual participating.

**Historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs)** refers to colleges and universities founded primarily in the southeastern United States after the Civil War that were established for the newly freed slaves of African descent (Wallace, 1993).

**Historically White fraternities and sororities** refers to the fraternities and sororities on the campus that are affiliated with the National Panhellenic Conference or the National Interfraternity Conference.

**Inter-fraternity Council (IFC)** refers to the student governing association of the men's National Inter-fraternity Conference fraternities on the campus.

**Membership Intake Process (MIP)** refers to the process by which one becomes a member of a historically Black Greek letter organization. MIP was initiated by the NPHC member organizations in 1990 as a response to counter dangerous hazing and pledging practices at the time.

**National Interfraternity Conference (NIC)** refers to the international governing association of 63 men's college fraternities throughout Canada and the United States.

**National Panhellenic Conference (NPC)** refers to the international governing association of 26 women's college fraternities throughout Canada and the United States.

**National Pan-Hellenic Conference (NPHC)** refers to the international governing association that represents nine historically Black Greek fraternities and sororities. The term NPHC also refers to the local student governing association on the campus.

**Predominately White institutions (PWIs)** refers to colleges and universities in which the majority of the student population is composed of White (Anglo) students and has been throughout the history of the institution (Wallace, 1993).

**Soror** refers to the term of endearment and respect members of historically Black sororities utilize in reference to each other.

### Abbreviations

This study utilizes the following abbreviations in reference to the three governing associations:

NIC—National Inter-Fraternity Conference

NPC—National Panhellenic Conference

NPHC—National Pan-Hellenic Council

### Overview

Chapter I presented an introduction to the problem of White women's participation in historically Black sororities. The purpose of the study, research questions, significance of the study, limitations of the study, and definition of terms of the study are included.

Chapter II presents a review of the literature in regards to White student participation in historically Black sororities, highlighting the lack of research in the area. Chapter 2 is divided into three sections: (1) the history of BGLO; (2) co-curricular involvement; and (3) differences between Black and White Greek systems.

Chapter III presents the research methodology and design of the study and includes a restatement of the purpose of the study, description of the participants, instrumentation, data collection, and treatment of the data.

Chapter IV presents the results of the study. Chapter V presents speculation on the meaning of the results in addition to the study's significance, conclusions, limitations, and recommendations.

## CHAPTER II

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

More and more individuals are entering the North American higher educational system. In fact, many state colleges and universities are experiencing the largest class of incoming first year students in their respective histories (Thomas, 1998). As these numerous students enter universities, some will seek co-curricular activities to enhance their college experience. Some students will seek activity boards, intramural sports, student government, special interest groups, or professional clubs to name a few possible activities. Still other students will seek out social fraternities and sororities.

History of Black Greek Letter Organizations

A seven-member study group founded the first BGLO in America that still exists, Alpha Phi Alpha, Incorporated, on the campus of Cornell University in Ithaca, New York ("Black Greek fraternities in the '90s," 1993). Scholarship, social purpose, and commitment to community service were the basic tenets under which the fraternity was founded. Other major Black fraternities and sororities were established with similar intended missions. Since their founding, Black Greek organizations have traditionally emphasized "a sense of social obligations and a desire for high achievement among their memberships" (Whipple, Baier, & Grady, 1991, p. 141). "Black fraternities and sororities are among the oldest Black campus organizations on most predominately White campuses and are possibly the strongest nationwide social institutions in Black America," forming one of the largest formal and informal political networks in the nation (McKee, 1987, p. 27).

The governing body of the nine major Historically Black Greek organizations is the National Pan-Hellenic Council, Incorporated (NPHC). The NPHC was founded in 1930 for the expressive purpose of overseeing the nation's historically Black social Greek letter organizations (Thompson, 2000). The National Pan-Hellenic Council, Incorporated is currently composed of nine (9) international Greek letter sororities and fraternities. The nine organizations and their year of founding are as follows: Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. (1908), Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc. (1906), Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. (1913), Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc. (1920), Iota Phi Theta Fraternity, Inc. (1963), Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc. (1911), Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority, Inc. (1922), Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, Inc. (1914), and Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc. (1911) (National Pan-Hellenic Council, n.d.). Each member organization has its own distinct character, traditions, and heritage. Yet each organization offers unique insight into the understanding and the development of Black socioeconomic and cultural life (NPHC, n.d.).

NPHC's website (<http://www.nphchq.org>) promotes interaction through forums, meetings and other media for the exchange of information and engages in cooperative programming and initiatives through various activities and functions. While NPHC affiliate organizations recognize the social aspect of Greek college life, the primary purpose and focus of member organizations remains community awareness and action through educational, economic, and cultural service activities. NPHC affiliates and their respective members have pledged to devote their resources to service in their respective communities, realizing that the membership experience of NPHC



organizations goes beyond organizational membership during an individual's college career (National Pan-Hellenic Council, n.d.)

Schuh, Triponey, Heim, and Nishimura (1992) studied the experiences of undergraduate members of NPHC organizations. Schuh, et al. (1992) utilized focus groups that consisted of twenty-two students who were members of six NPHC fraternities and sororities at Wichita State University. Schuh, et al. (1992) found that the NPHC organizations afforded the study participants opportunities to develop intense relationships, participate in numerous community service activities, serve as role models for young men and women, and understand the importance of collaboration and unity among NPHC organizations.

Today's national Greek organizations have made efforts to include and recruit students from a variety of ethnic backgrounds, at least on the national level. Thompson (2000, p. 21) stated, "None of the over 100 national social Greek-letter organizations that exist today have policies which restrict membership." Until the 1960s and the Civil Rights Movement, however, "most historically White national fraternities and sororities had constitutional stipulations or covenants prohibiting membership of nonwhites" (Whipple, Baier, & Grady, 1991, p. 140). According to Whipple, et al., (1991), all Greek organizations have been required by federal law since 1963 to abstain from discriminatory practices based upon race. However, Bryan (1987) argued, "Fraternities and sororities cannot be defined as bastions of tolerance when it comes to minority differences..." (p. 47). Bryan also stated, "It is clear that many social barriers exist when it comes to membership consideration in fraternities and sororities" (p. 47). It would seem that historically White organizations are still identifiably White, and historically



Black organizations are still identifiably Black. Pascarella, Whitt, Nora, Edison, Hagedorn, and Terenzini (1995) found that Greek affiliation had a significant negative effect on one's willingness to challenge the existing system as well as diversity for both men and women. The researchers speculated that one explanation of these results was the homogeneity of Greek groups. Not only are the aforementioned organizations segregated racially, but virtually no interaction between the two groups exists as well. Black and White Greeks typically have separate governance structures or councils and there is little to no participation by Black Greeks in the traditional recruitment activities or Greek Week programs of White Greeks (Whipple, et al., 1991). Similarly, there is little to no participation by White Greeks in Black Greek activities such as step shows.

#### Co-curricular Involvement

Co-curricular activities, often referred to as extra-curricular activities, have become an integral part of college and university campuses. According to Emert (1940), many psychologists and educators believe in the value of extra-curricular activities for development. Society desires not only a socially adjusted person, but a socially adjusted person that knows something (Cole, 1936). "Extra-curricular activities furnish a laboratory for living" (Emert, 1940, p. 2). In a world that virtually requires one to be completely socially adjusted, it is necessary for students to develop the best possible social adjustment with their peers in order to attain the most benefits possible during their college careers. According to Weidman, Twale, and Stein (2001), socialization can be defined in a broad sense as "the process by which persons acquire the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that make them more or less effective members of their society" (p. 4). Weidman, et al. (2001) stated

Socialization can also be characterized metaphorically. Socialization can also be understood as “a train leaving the station” for a particular destination, rather it is from matriculation to licensure to first-year student without friends to second-year students with many friends. Socialization becomes a continuum of experiences, with some experiences being commonly and uniformly felt by students and others perceived differently by students with different characteristics. Each step along the journey has particular significance, becomes a key rite of passage, or adds important people and information in the mix. Socialization can be viewed as an upward-moving spiral carrying the neophyte through recurring processes toward the goal of professionalization. The experiences may repeat themselves, but each of the experiences results in new, higher levels of professional and personal maturity (p. 5).

Student organizations and co-curricular involvement play valuable roles in preparing students for the reality of working in a global society. They provide students with an opportunity to develop and utilize leadership and citizenship skills, and to learn about problem solving, conflict resolution, and democracy (Thompson, 2000). Through extra-curricular activities, students learn to live and work successfully with other people. In group living and working environments, individuals may develop initiative, self-reliance, and self-discipline, providing that activity is purposeful. In learning to be successful in getting along with others, the students’ own personalities are developed as well as their respect for other personalities. Security, cooperation, and an objective point of view are nurtured in purposeful group activity (Emert, 1940). The coordination of curricular and co-curricular activities is a goal that is both “desirable and necessary”

in order for students to develop values and perspective (Steed, 1944). Students have stated that they learn more from their out-of-class experiences than from their in-class experiences (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Participation with co-curricular activities has become so extensive that parents and faculty are often led to question exactly what is the primary motivation for students—the curriculum or the co-curricular activities (Emert, 1940).

Involvement with Greek co-curricular activities has been fulfilling specific student needs since the inception of fraternal organizations. Students clearly want what Greek organizations have to offer (Lord, 1987). Partaking in the Greek experience enables the individual to belong, to identify, and to participate; a basic need in the life of most college students (Foley & Foley, 1969). According to Owen (1991), the original purpose of Greek organizations was to assist college students' personal development by means of educational debates, the presentation of original works and academic papers, all in the context of fun. "The Greek experience should be a teaching and learning activity designed to build confidence and character, to establish an intellectual growth pattern to be continued throughout life, to obtain a baccalaureate degree, to develop mature human relations and social skills, to acquire an understanding and respect for differing ideas and opinions, and to develop attainable personal and professional life goals" (McKee, 1987, p. 27.)

Greek letter organizations are private, voluntary, self-governing groups (Boschini, 1998). Greeks can decide on which individuals to select as new members for their organizations, nominate and elect their own officers, and manage their day-to-day functioning. Although Greek organizations retain the authority to self-govern, they still

remain accountable in numerous ways to alumni, the university, and the Greek governing organizations on campus (Boschini, 1998). Colleges and universities cannot tell fraternities or sororities whom to select or not select as members, but they can provide a vision, culture, and support systems that explicitly and genuinely support diversity.

### Differences Between Black and White Greek Systems

Many differences exist between Black and White Greek organizations. According to Whipple, et al., (1991), Black organizations have a much larger percentage of alumni who remain active with their campus-based chapters than is the case with White organizations. Black Greeks put great value and importance in achieving academic excellence (Kunjufu, 1997). White Greeks tend to achieve lower academically than their non-White counterparts (Binder, Schaub, Seiler, & Lake, 2002). Also, on most predominantly White college campuses, Black Greeks provide the major social structure for most Blacks on campus, both members and nonmembers alike (Whipple et al., 1991). Unlike their White Greek counterparts who generally do not desire or attempt to provide programs and social outlets for anyone "outside the circle," Black Greeks are acutely aware of their obligations to provide programming and social venues to their fellow brothers and sisters of color (McKee, 1987). "Black Greeks have played, and continue to play, significant roles as sources of racial pride and as an important identity group for Black students at predominantly White institutions" (McKee, 1987, p. 29). For many Black college students, Black Greeks represent a link to not only their heritage, but also their future.

American college life is characterized by the elaborate development of an autonomous undergraduate culture that forms the immediate environment of the student (Newcomb & Wilson, 1966). "Black Greek organizations have created a Black subculture on marginally integrated campuses to satisfy the social desires of the majority of the Black student population" (Daniel, 1976, p. 192).

Black Greeks rush and recruit potential members at different times than their White counterparts and, on White campuses, are havens from White exclusion (Lord, 1987). Black organizations also preserve minority culture and prevent dilution of minority identity. Black Greeks are more service-oriented than their White counterparts. Stains (1994) estimated that Black fraternities devote five times as many man-hours to community service than do White fraternities. And the nature of said community service, which involves less money raising and more hands-on help, is an attraction in itself to some students. Black and White Greeks differ not just in skin color, but in their fundamental value orientations, family backgrounds, educational objectives, and purpose for existence (Whipple, et al., 1991).

In their study of 620 fraternity and sorority members, Whipple, et al., (1991) found that there are many more differences than similarities between Black and White Greeks at the university studied. "Black Greeks generally come from a lower socioeconomic background, are more academically motivated, more liberal, more socially conscious, and more peer independent than White Greeks" (p. 146). They also found that Black Greeks are also less likely to join a Greek organization during the first-year of college, are less likely to live in a fraternity or sorority house, and spend fewer of their undergraduate years affiliated with their Greek organization. So, despite the

fact that Black and White Greek organizations both claim to be social and use Greek letters as names, their members' attitudes, values, behaviors, educational objective, socioeconomic status, and family background are quite different.

Historically White fraternities and sororities often receive criticism for not espousing values and behaviors that are in alignment with those of their host institution. Colleges and universities spend much time, energy, and money studying their relationships with fraternal organizations. Some institutions have chosen to remove fraternal organizations from their campuses, whereas other institutions have chosen to commit to work with these groups but with newly developed standards of operation and behavior. College and university presidents, the American Association of State and Universities (AASCU), the National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities (NAICU), the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges (NASULGC), and inter/national Greek organization executive directors have joined together to develop a presidential initiative to transform the collegiate Greek environment ("A call for values congruence," 2002).

In their study comparing historically Black and White Greek letter sororities, Berkowitz and Padavic (1999) found that White and Black sororities differ in many ways. They collected data by means of twenty-six, open ended in-depth interviews conducted by the first author. Interviews were divided evenly between White and Black sorority sisters. The interviews centered on three broad areas: women's reasons for joining the sorority, the sororities' activities in regard to academic and social life, and women's career plans and the sorority's role in those plans.



The White sorority women sampled in the study regarded sorority membership as a way to lead a productive social life that they hoped would aid them in “getting a man” (Berkowitz & Padavic, 1999). The sorority’s structure encouraged this pursuit of romantic relationships by sponsoring candle-lighting ceremonies, frequent formal date events, and informal functions whose bar-like ambiance and high rate of alcohol consumption facilitated coupling. Berkowitz and Padavic (1999) found Black women’s involvement with their sororities centered on community service and career advancement. Community service was the largest activity that the sororities engaged in and was a meaningful part of all phases of participation. Interviewees described the role of the sorority graduates in career networking as perhaps the most beneficial aspect of sorority life (Berkowitz & Padavic, 1999).

Berkowitz and Padavic (1999) found that Black sororities did not offer much institutional support for romantic relationships; they offered virtually nothing akin to candlightings, sponsored few dating functions, and centered informal social functions on group activities. Not surprisingly, most of the Black women in this sample did not feel that having a romantic relationship was a necessity.

Berkowitz and Padavic (1999) found that these different orientations (lifelong membership with Black sororities vs. membership limited to one’s college career with White sororities) affected women’s sense of sisterhood and levels of commitment to the sororities. Black women’s more intense involvement was fostered by opportunities to participate throughout life. In comparison, White women’s orientation toward the sorority was much more phase oriented; in other words, limited to their college years.

They concluded that the Black sorority structure is more in tune with the probable labor force and family prospects of modern college women.

Berkowitz and Padavic (1999) found that Black sororities' orientation toward career building is more in step with the reality of the modern college woman. To ensure its survival, the White sorority structure will probably shift to accommodate the larger social changes that increasingly manifest themselves in individual members' lives. Berkowitz and Padavic (1999) concluded that the two types of sororities appear to be structured to facilitate two agendas: for White women, short-term participation geared toward meeting men, and for Black women, long-term participation geared toward furthering both individual careers and the uplifting of the race through community projects.

### Summary of Literature

Three areas were examined for the present study's review of literature: the history of Black Greek letter organizations, co-curricular involvement, and the differences between Black and White Greek systems. Due to the racially discriminatory practices of White Greek organizations, Black Greek letter organizations were founded mainly so that students of color could be unified and support each other academically and emotionally, as well as provide social outlets on predominately White campuses. Schuh, et al. (1992) studied the experiences of undergraduate members of NPHC organizations and found that NPHC organizations provided members with opportunities to develop intense relationships, participate in numerous community service activities, serve as role models for young men and women, and understand the importance of collaboration and unity among NPHC organizations. Today, the nine major Black



fraternities and sororities “are among the oldest Black campus organizations on most predominately White campuses and are possibly the strongest nationwide social institutions in Black America” (McKee, 1987, p. 27.) The nine major Black Greek letter organizations are governed under the auspices of the National Pan-Hellenic Council, Incorporated (NPHC), founded in 1930 to be the central representative body for its member organizations.

The literature revealed that co-curricular involvement is not only important, but also necessary. Co-curricular involvement has become a vital aspect on the contemporary campus. Co-curricular involvement helps students become socially adjusted, an essential characteristic needed in order to become an effective member of society. Student organizations and co-curricular activities play valuable roles in preparing students for the reality of working in a global society. Student organizations provide students with an opportunity to develop and utilize leadership and citizenship skills, and to learn about problem solving, conflict resolution, and democracy (Thompson, 2000). Involvement with Greek co-curricular activities has been fulfilling specific student needs since the inception of fraternal organizations. Partaking in the Greek experience enables the individual to belong, to identify, and to participate; a basic need in the life of most college students (Foley & Foley, 1969).

The literature pertaining to the differences between Black and White Greek letter organizations revealed that they are two very dissimilar entities. Whipple, et al. (1991) found that Black Greeks are less socio-economically advantaged, more academically motivated, more socially conscious, more peer independent, less likely to join their first-year of college, less likely to live in a chapter house, and spend fewer

undergraduate years affiliated with their organizations when compared to their White Greek counterparts. In their study examining Black and White sororities, Berkowitz and Padavic (1999) concluded that the two types of sororities appear to be structured to facilitate two agendas: for White women, short-term participation geared toward meeting men, and for Black women, long-term participation geared toward furthering both individual careers and the uplifting of the race through community projects. Black and White Greeks differ academically, socially, philanthropically, as well as how they recruit and train new members. Black and White Greeks differ not just in skin color, but in their fundamental value orientations, family backgrounds, educational objectives, and purpose for existence (Whipple, et al., 1991).

### CHAPTER III

#### METHODOLOGY

Virtually all research pertaining to college students' Greek life experience has been limited to quantitative research data collection techniques. This research utilized qualitative research techniques for data collection and assessment procedures. Thompson (2000) referred to Stage's assertion that limiting research pertaining to the college student experience to only quantitative methods effectively strips away important details and wrote: "By stripping away those idiosyncrasies, we imply that anything that is important to know about students on our campus can be reduced to numbers...details about students, their personal lives, and the influences on the college experience are lost" (p. 31). McMillan and Schumacher (2001) asserted, "Qualitative research is based on a constructivist philosophy that assumes reality as multilayer, interactive, and a shared social experience interpreted by individuals...Qualitative research is first concerned with understanding the social phenomena from the participants' perspective" (p. 396.) Bogdan and Biklen (1992) also noted that researchers who use the qualitative approach are interested in the ways people make sense of their lives. They further commented that qualitative researchers "seek to grasp the process by which people construct meaning and to describe what those meanings are" (p. 48). The type of qualitative research used for this research was "generic or basic" which "seeks to discover and understand a phenomenon, a process, or the perspectives and worldviews of the people involved" (Merriam, 1998, p. 11).

### Setting

The study took place in four different settings. The researcher allowed the participants to have control over the interview environment. As a result, the locations were determined by the study participants with an emphasis on a comfortable setting where confidentiality could be maintained with few interruptions.

### Participants

Purposeful sampling was utilized in the selection of study participants. According to Patton (1990), purposeful sampling is “selecting information-rich cases for study in-depth” when one wants to understand something about those cases without needing or desiring to generalize to all such cases. One may elect to utilize purposeful sampling in order to increase the utility of information obtained from small samples (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001). Three of the participants interviewed were selected using this format in hopes of obtaining “information rich key informants” important to qualitative study. One of the members in this initial sampling group further identified a fourth member. This technique is referred to as network or snowball sampling. With network sampling, each participant refers the researcher to potential subsequent participants for the study. All subjects were made aware of the goal for the study, agreed to participate in the study, and signed a participant informed consent form (Appendix A). All participants were reassured that the researcher would maintain the utmost confidence and guaranteed anonymity. Participants were also made aware of their right to refuse to answer any research question and/or withdraw from the study.

According to Merton, Fiske, and Kendall (1990), qualitative studies require small samples because of the considerable labor involved in conducting them. The

participants were four White women, ages 21 to 31, who were either a) members of international university-recognized sororities governed under the auspices of the NPHC or b) were members of international university-recognized sororities governed by the NPHC during their undergraduate years. The study participants who had completed their undergraduate studies were also active in graduate chapters of their respective sororities at the time of data collection. BGLOs do not restrict membership to the undergraduate level. Further, undergraduate members are expected and encouraged to continue their affiliation and continue to pay dues within the organization post-graduation by means of graduate alumni chapters. For these reasons, White alumnae members of historically Black organizations were included in the study. Two of the women selected were enrolled in undergraduate studies at a mid-size Midwestern university at the time of data collection. The other two women were graduates, one from a mid-size comprehensive university and one from a Research I institution, both also located in the Midwest. All of the participants were raised in the Midwest. Two of the participants were first-generation college students. All interviewees were active members of sororities that are governed under the auspices of the National Pan-Hellenic Council.

### Instrumentation

The instrumentation for this study consisted of an interview guide protocol (Appendix B). The researcher developed an interview guide protocol for the investigation that was reviewed and critiqued by the researcher's thesis committee (comprised of faculty members in the researcher's academic department), graduate

students with Greek experience, and other Student Affairs professionals who differed in gender, racial, and/or ethnic backgrounds.

The interview guide protocol consisted of open-ended questions that allowed study participants to respond thoroughly. This permitted the study participants to respond from their own life perspective, permitting the researcher to further probe questions as needed. The open-ended questions were developed around the research questions. Further questions were asked in order to delve into the participants' experiences, add to the data collection, as well as to further extrapolate details from the study participants.

#### Data Collection

All study participants were initially contacted during the spring of 2002 via telephone or in person and asked if they would be willing to participate in the study. The purpose of the study and the role of study subjects were made clear to all participants. All participants verbally agreed to participate at that time. As the researcher continued to develop the study, all participants were kept abreast of the study's progression on a monthly basis by either telephone or personal interaction.

All interviews were conducted over a two-week period in March, 2003. Interviews were conducted for approximately one hour with the researcher allowing the participants to extend the time if necessary. To address the research questions, the author of this study set up individual interviews with the study participants. Before each interview began, the researcher reiterated the purpose of the study and the role of study subjects for each participant. The researcher asked each participant if she still wanted to participate in the study and be audio taped. Each participant agreed to

participate and signed an informed consent form (Appendix A). Research participants were asked a series of open-ended questions in order to give them an opportunity to clarify and state their experiences in response to the questions. By doing this, the research participants were able to answer questions from their own frame of reference as well as allow the author of this study to probe further into questions as needed.

The researcher chose not to utilize pseudonyms for the participants. Although pseudonyms provide study participants a certain degree of anonymity, due to the close proximity of each participant and the limited number of participants who fit the research criteria, pseudonyms were not used in an effort to increase anonymity.

#### Treatment of Data

The constant comparative method was used to manage the data. According to Merriam (1998),

The constant comparative method of data analysis was developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) as the means of developing grounded theory. A grounded theory consists of categories, properties, and hypotheses that are the conceptual links between and among the categories and properties. Because the basic strategy of the constant comparative method is compatible with the inductive, concept-building orientation of all qualitative research, the constant comparative method of data analysis has been adopted by many researchers who are not seeking to build substantive theory (p. 159).

Steps were taken to thoroughly examine the study participant's responses given at the time of data collection. After the interviews were transcribed, analyzed, and member



checked, a summary of themes was prepared. Themes common to all participants were noted and are presented in the results section under each research question.

The present study was an extension of the results of an exploratory study identifying factors that influenced a woman's participation in historically Black sororities at predominantly White universities in the Midwest. A secondary goal of the present study was to understand the study participants' experiences in these respective sororities. The study utilized qualitative research methods for data collection. This section describes the research design, data collection, and data analysis for the four research questions. These additional themes emerged that were not a part of the research questions. These themes were included because of their significance.

**Research Question 1: How do factors influence the decision of White women to join historically Black sororities?**

It

participation

White women

the sororities

multicultural

2000, 2001

2000, 2001

71

multicultural

100 to 100

2000, 2001

## CHAPTER IV

## RESULTS

This chapter summarizes the results of an exploratory study identifying factors that influence White women's participation in historically Black sororities at predominately White universities in the Midwest. A secondary goal of the present study was to understand the study participants' experiences in their respective sororities. The researcher utilized qualitative research methods for data collection. This section describes emergent themes from the present study in relation to the four research questions. Three additional themes emerged that were not a part of the research questions. Those themes have been included because of their significance.

Research Question One: What factors influence the decision of White women to join historically Black sororities?

The participants in this study decided to join their respective sororities for a multitude of reasons. Five themes emerged as factors that influenced the decision of White women to join historically Black sororities: 1) perceived quality of sisterhood in the chapter; 2) perceived diversity among members within the chapter, 3) external influences; 4) perceived common value system with the organization; and 5) aversion to NPC sororities. Each theme is expanded below.

*Perceived Quality of Sisterhood in the Chapter*

Three of the four participants indicated that their perceptions of the quality of sisterhood in the chapter and their desire to experience such sisterhood were factors that led to their decision to join a historically Black sorority. The fact that the sisterhood between existing members of the chapters was personally observable and not just a

token catch phrase was very attractive to study participants before they became members of their respective organizations. One participant who was attracted by her chapter's sisterhood stated that her interest in sorority life was "all about the sisterhood" and that she wanted to experience that sisterhood for herself. Another participant stated how the chapter's sisterhood impacted her attraction to the sorority. She asserted, "I think what drew me in was just the whole bond of sisterhood that they had. I could see their sisterhood." One participant also spoke of sisterhood as being on the same level of family, paralleling her relationship with her sorors to the relationship she has with her older brother. This participant said that sisterhood was "a bond of women who are willing to help each other and to be there for each other when they are needed. It's like a real family. It's like completely a real family." One participant spoke of how the camaraderie and sisterhood were very appealing to her in regard to sorority life. She stated that, "In my mind, it seemed like the African-American sororities had more sisterhood than the White sororities."

#### *Perceived Diversity Among Members within the Chapter*

Three of the four participants perceived the diversity among existing sorority members to be appealing for membership. All four participants described their chapters as having a very diverse membership, with no two people being alike. Diversity as defined by these women did not necessarily extend to the ethnic or racial demographics of the existing membership. Rather, the participants described diversity in regard to the members' involvement in other co-curricular activities outside of the sorority, their chosen fields of study, personalities, and physical appearance (for example, style of clothing; body shape; skin tone, etc.). One participant described her perception of the

sorority prior to joining as, "a variety of people...without any type of stereotypes or molds." She described the sorority members prior to joining as, "...Everyone seemed very down to earth, everyone was welcoming and inviting." This participant also asserted that there are not more White people joining NPHC organizations, but there are more White members of NPHC organizations remaining active in the organizations over time. She also believed that her membership in her sorority was not anything spectacular or amazing because other White women had joined her sorority before she did. One participant believed her chapter to be "one of the most diverse organizations" on her campus and, like another participant, believed her membership was not anything out of the ordinary to them because they previously had White members. One participant stated,

I was very struck by the fact that they all were very much their own individual.

I mean, they all didn't look the same way, they didn't do the same thing. I could tell all six of them were very different people but were in the same organization together, which appealed to me.

#### *Internal and External Influences*

All study participants described how internal and external influences affected their decision to join their respective sororities. Influence was classified into two categories: 1) internal influences: existing members of the organization and 2) external influence: non-Greek peers. Each type of influence is expanded below.

##### *Internal Influences: Existing Members of the Organization*

Existing members of the organization influenced all four participants' desire for membership in their respective sororities. All participants described how individual

members of their respective sororities positively influenced their perceptions. The participants' first impressions of their sororities were the result of observing the actions of members within the organizations. One participant described her observation of a member of the sorority who worked on her campus, "[She] is a proud [member] and she will tell you and she would come by and tell us." This participant also described how the local alumnae chapter would come to campus and assist in the recruitment of new members. Another participant spoke of how an undergraduate member of the sorority, who served as an academic advisor on the participant's residence hall floor, exhibited a completely different aspect of sorority life than that to which the participant was accustomed. Prior to college matriculation, her exposure to sorority life as a high school student living in a college town consisted of drunken fraternity parties where random coupling between NPC and NIC members was a common activity. She said she did not realize there was a difference between the actions of one member and all other members within a group. In contrast, the sorority member on her residence hall floor was accountable, business-like, and goal driven. Another participant described how members of the organization at another campus helped her in a time of need prior to her becoming a member of the organization. She stated,

Wow, they really didn't have to do that. They could have left me out sitting in the lobby....it didn't matter. But, she [a member of the sorority] took it upon herself to really help me out. So, it made me come back [to my undergraduate institution] and be like, okay what are [the chapter members at my campus] really talking about? Because I figured, you know, it's the same principle all around, so, let me see how these individual girls are.

Another participant described how she was influenced by the manner in which an existing member of the chapter reached out to her.

One of the [members of the chapter] who ended up being my pledge mother was friends with some friends of mine and we were all talking one time. She was just talking about the sisterhood and camaraderie and that kind of thing and that was what initially—I guess that's what caught my attention. She was just really, really talking about the sisterhood. And then, I asked her a couple of questions and I guess she picked up on that I was interested. She started calling me periodically just to talk with me about the organization and how I was doing. And I was kind of touched by her personal interest in me as well as her passion for the organization. She was just so passionate about her sisters, her sorors, the organization, and all of that. And I think that made a huge impression for me. Her passion for it and the way she talked about the sisterhood, combined with the fact that I guess I was flattered that she was calling me and talking to me about it.

#### *External Influences: Non-Greek Peers*

Participants' decisions to pursue membership in their respective sororities were also influenced by peers outside of the organization. One participant described how as she learned about the history and founding of the sorority, she also learned that some of her friends were interested in the sorority as well. She described how her MIP class consisted of her best friend, as well as a woman with whom she attended high school. She stated, "A couple of my other friends were kind of interested in [pursuing membership] so, I was like, well, I'll look into it." Another participant described how

she and her friends decided that they were going to pursue membership together. She stated,

There were four of us [who] decided that we were going to go to the Tea and try to go through the process and as we talked about it, it was that as well. You know, the social thing, my friends, and I thought I would like to do this.

*Perceived Common Value System with the Organization*

The fact that the respective sorority's goals and value system was consistent with her own was an attractive factor for membership for three of the four participants. Two of the participants described this compatibility as finding a "fit" with the chapter. One of the participants described the compatibility as "meshing well" with the existing sorority members. One participant had not planned pursuing sorority membership until she learned about her sorority.

I just didn't really see that I fit in with what I saw. So, once I saw [the sorority] and I started to find out more about it, I could see that I fit there. I really didn't consider joining a sorority at all until I learned about [the sorority.] I couldn't see myself in any of the other groups, but I could see myself in [the sorority]... and I just liked what they stood for.

Another participant was extremely demonstrative when describing how her values were consistent with the sorority.

I mean, it was just like; everything they stood for was what was inside of me. Everything that they strived for was everything that I was striving for in my personal life. And it was just like, why would I not join? When people work together, they can make more of an impact on the world than when they work



alone. And, so, basically I just wanted somebody along with me who was going to have the same goals as I did and work for the goals just as hard as I knew that I wanted to work for those goals so that we can make more of an impact.

#### *Aversion to NPC Sororities*

All four participants described an aversion to NPC sororities as a discriminate factor when deciding to pursue membership in their respective sororities. Although the researcher did not ask anything about participant impressions of NPC member sororities, all participants said the differences between NPHC and NPC sororities were determining factors in their decision to join a historically Black sorority. One participant described the sororities as “just different.” Another participant was not impressed with some of the activities of the NPC sororities, such as serenading NIC fraternities late into wee hours of the morning. She described her aversion in that she was not “trying to do all of that.” This same participant did however partake in the recruitment activities of an NPC sorority after being invited by a friend who was a member of that sorority. This participant particularly did not find the requirement to reside in the sorority chapter house to be attractive. She was extremely adamant with her dislike of sorority housing.

I wasn't ever anti-sorority, [but] I was definitely anti-sorority house. Because I'm just like, I cannot live with that many women. I just could not see it. I could not even see myself doing that. So, there's no way I could see living in a house with a whole bunch of women and having to, you know—I just could not even see living in a house.

Another participant described her dislike toward the NPC recruitment and selection processes. At her undergraduate institution, the CPH began recruitment activities soon after classes began in the fall semester.

My freshman year, it was so funny. It was like September and we had only been there like a month or so. [The NPC sororities] were having this big hoopla at the [campus center] and stuff. And all these girls came back and they're all, "I'm a Sigma Kappa or Chi Omega" and I'm like, "What are you talking about?" You know, [I] had no clue, but I wasn't interested either... they became members so quickly in the White organizations... to me, it's like, if you choose to be a part of something bigger, it should be bigger and more special and better. I didn't like how quickly it all happened and things like that."

Another participant described how she was able to observe potential NPC members preparing for recruitment activities.

...Virtually everyone on my [residence hall] floor went through formal rush. I mean there were two of us on the entire floor that didn't go through rush. It was a huge thing. I was turned off by that. Like, initially, when everyone started talking about it, I thought that it might be kind of cool, you know, and I kind of listened. Although the more I heard, the more I was turned off by it because they were going to Chicago to buy their rush outfits, and their rush jewelry and, you know, it was just really crazy to me.

Research Question Two: What are perceived barriers that exist for White women's participation in historically Black sororities?

The participants in this study did not perceive many barriers for their participation in their respective sororities. Two themes emerged as perceived barriers that existed for White women's participation in historically Black sororities. These themes were 1) Membership questioned from outside the chapter and 2) Feeling the need to prove oneself. Each theme is expanded below.

*Membership Questioned from Outside the Chapter*

Three participants described how individuals outside of their respective chapters perceived them as less than or unworthy of membership. The participants described how people outside of the chapter sometimes questioned their membership without knowing them. One participant's desire for membership was questioned as she began MIP for her sorority. She stated,

Before I became a [member], somebody called me on the phone and was like, "If you love [the sorority], you wouldn't do this." She was like, "If you love [the sorority] as much as you say you do, then you wouldn't do this because you know that you're breaking tradition and that you're going against what [the sorority] stands for." But, obviously, she didn't know what [the sorority] stands for.

This participant felt as if people who are unfamiliar with her are going to question her membership based solely on the fact that she was White. She attributed her

membership being questioned by people outside of her chapter to the fact that they do not know her.

Why would they be accepting of me? [Outsiders] don't know [how long I have been a member]. They don't see what I do. They don't know why I joined.

They don't know any of that. All they see is what they think is a White girl trying to be Black and that's not what it is at all... outside of my chapter

everybody is always like, "Well, what does she do?" You know, "Why her?"

"Why did they pick her?" "What makes her so special?" And I know that when

I was chosen and people heard that I was going through MIP, they were like,

"Well, why would they choose her over so many qualified Black women?"

One participant said that although she was never questioned or approached directly, members of her chapter were questioned about her membership. One participant felt as if her membership would not be taken seriously or disregarded because she is White.

One participant received disapproval from members of other NPHC organizations and stated, "There were some [NPHC fraternity members] and some [NPHC sorority members] and I walked past and they were like, "What? The [organization has] done-- <nonverbal disapproval>? They're stupid; they done got a White girl." This participant understood and expected to receive criticism and disapproval prior to joining her sorority. Although the participant expected to receive disapproval, receiving it still upset her. "It hurt a little. Back then, it hurt a lot actually because, you know, I went through enough and [I] don't need to [be] put through any more."

*Feeling the Need to Prove Oneself*

The need to prove oneself stemmed from having one's membership questioned. One participant felt that she had to do more than other members of the chapter to demonstrate her worth as a member. She stated,

Sometimes, it feels to me that people look at me and [think], "Okay, well, what are you doing here?" Or they think that I do have some ulterior motive other than the fact that my reasons [for joining] are the exact same reasons as yours. So, I have always felt the need to step it up.

One participant felt she had to prove herself not only to the existing chapter members, but she also had to prove her worth to alumnae members of the chapter.

It took me to get to meet the older sorors because they didn't want to meet me. They didn't want to like me and everything thing like that. But once they met me, they couldn't help but like me. But if they don't know me yet, then they're probably still a little shaky about [me being a member in the chapter] and, honestly, some sorors don't like it.

Research Question Three: How do White women who are members of historically Black sororities describe their experience?

The participants in this study described their experiences as White women within Black sororities with mixed sentiments. Three themes emerged from the participants describing their experiences. These themes were 1) life within the sorority; 2) level of involvement; and 3) being perceived as the most dependable. Each theme is expanded below.

*Life within the Sorority*

Life within the sorority was defined as how the participants perceived their respective chapter's functioning and their role within the functioning. Life within the sorority was categorized into two classifications 1) camaraderie and 2) conflict.

*Life within the Sorority-Camaraderie*

All participants described their experience with positive regard. One participant described her experience as "amazing" as she smiled from ear to ear on her face. She stated,

We know how to work with each other—we know how to get along with each other and we know how to love each other. In my chapter, it's just like everybody is one person regardless of race, religion, anything like that.

Everybody is really one person.

One participant said her experience was "good" and she could not remember anything negative about it. In reflecting back on her experience, one participant said that she had "a really good time." One participant said her expectations were met in more ways than she could have imagined. All participants attributed their enjoyable experiences to the relationships they developed with chapter members, especially with the members that joined the sorority with them. Participants referred to these members of the chapter as "sands." One participant said that she could never have met "three better people" when she described the relationship she has with her sands. When asked about her experience, she stated,

[My expectations were] exceeded, three hundred times. You can be told this, that, the other, but you never really know until you're into it. It's an interesting

standpoint because not only did I go through this process and things that nothing could have ever prepared me for, but I [also] loved it and grew from it and it made me a better person.

One participant said that the camaraderie she had with her chapter extended to all of the sorority chapters in the state.

[My experience] was going pretty well. At that time all of the sorors in the state all knew each other. I mean, I could tell you [about] like [any sorority member in the state]. You say a name, [I would say,] "Oh, she pledged at [a specific chapter] in [a specific year]," or "She pledged at [a specific chapter] in [a specific year] and her line name was such and such..." [Back then], everybody knew everybody. When [my chapter] went to a school, we would just roll deep. Everybody was tight like that.

#### *Life within the sorority-Conflict*

Although all the participants said that they had positive experiences with their respective sorority, all participants also described conflict within the chapter. This fact is quite contradictory to the previous sub-theme. A paradox existed with all participants. One participant decided to be inactive her senior year due to chapter drama and turmoil. She came to the conclusion that "the sisterhood could be there or it could not be there. It depended on the sorors." Another participant echoed similar sentiments stating,

Every soror is not your friend—an older soror told me that when I first came in. And I [was] like, "No, I love everybody and everybody loves me." And I had to find out that that's the case. Not every soror is your friend.



One participant said that chapter members get along very well, however, they do have disagreements.

We get along so well. Of course, every once in awhile we have our little times when we're just like, "Get out of my face, don't talk to me right now." But we get along really well. If we have a problem with [a chapter member], it's easy for us to go work it out. We all have different personalities, every single one of us.

One participant described how the chapter members were still supportive of each other, regardless of whether or not conflict existed between members.

We don't get along. We don't pretend to get along. We have our fights, we go through hell and back. You know, we've seen each other cry, bleed, puke, whatever. You know that even if you are so mad at her, that you can call her up and be like, "Girl, this, that, you know, is going on or whatever," and she's going to be like, "I'm on my way." You know, it doesn't matter. And, we are like, so different, but we work so well together.

### *Level of Involvement*

All participants described that their sorority experience was greatly affected by their level of involvement within the chapter. All four participants held at least one executive position within the chapter; two participants had the opportunity to hold two different executive positions during their experiences. Two participants also were residence hall assistants. In addition to executive board responsibilities, all participants assisted with various chapter programs. One participant said that because her chapter had so few members, everyone had to be involved. Two participants said that they were

responsible for making their sorority experience. One participant said, "I am a firm believer in that you're going to get out what you put in. So, to get out my optimal level, I definitely put in my optimal level." She said that she is involved not only in the chapter, but she is also involved at state, regional, and national levels, describing herself as an "up-and-coming leader in the organization." Another participant was nominated as outstanding chapter member for her involvement. This participant felt that if she was not as involved as she was, she would not be living up to her membership. She stated,

You make your sorority what you want it to be. And so, I think that if I were to just sit back and watch everybody else do the work, I wouldn't feel like I was upholding the reasons that I became a [member]. I became a [member] to work. And, I think that if I wasn't as involved as I am, I wouldn't have the bond that I do with my sorors, with the rest of the Greek community. If I wasn't involved with my chapter there [are] a lot of other things that I wouldn't be involved in as well.

One participant said that she became so fused with the chapter that the sorority virtually became her entire existence.

I was really involved initially. I was at everything, all of the things we had... [The sorority] was basically my life. I mean, that's what I did. I mean, I went to school and my grades were still okay, you know, they never got bad at all. I mean, I just ate, slept, breathed [the sorority.]

### *Being Perceived as Dependable*

Three of the four participants described their experience as taking on the role of making sure that all chapter business was completed and chapter needs were met. The

participants did not indicate whether or not the role was self-imposed or imposed on them by the chapter. One participant described this role as “stepping up”. If something needed to be done and no one else was willing to do it, then she felt the need to take it upon herself to make sure that it got done. One participant said that if anything needed to be completed, she would do it. She did have an awareness that her desire to help resulted in her “taking on too much” and becoming “overwhelmed.” One participant said her chapter described her as,

The one who makes sure that everything is getting done on time when it needs to be done. They always tell me that if something’s not going to get done, they know they can count on me to do it. So I’m kind of like the fall back person, I guess you could kind of say because I won’t let something not get done.

Research Question Four: What role do historically Black sororities play in the academic, social, and professional lives of their White members?

All participants indicated that their involvement a historically Black sorority had an impact on their academic, social, and professional lives. Three themes emerged from the roles historically Black sororities play in the academic, social, and professional lives of their White members. These themes were 1) importance of scholastic attainment; 2) participation in social activities; and 3) professional preparation. Each theme is expanded below.

*Importance of Scholastic Attainment*

Three participants indicated that educational achievement was an important aspect of chapter life. All participants had to earn at least a 2.5 cumulative grade point average on a 4.0 scale in order to be academically eligible for membership in their

respective sororities. One participant said that she always did well in classes, earning a 3.4 cumulative GPA on 4.0 scale, and her grades never suffered due to her involvement with the chapter. Two participants said their chapter required weekly study hours, time where chapter members would study and complete class work in an environment that was conducive to learning (for example, library or study lounges). These participants felt that the study hour requirement was helpful to their academics because they had busy lives and knew that every week, study hours had already been scheduled into their weekly activities. The participants also indicated that the study hours helped curb procrastination. One participant said,

[The sorority] keeps me on top of my studies because we have, you know, a mandatory five hours but it was up to ten hours. You know, it sounds bad, but it helps because it's a set time that you go and you can get this done instead of [saying], "Oh, I'll do this later."

Another participant, whose GPA had decreased since she became a member, was not sure if the decrease was a result of her sorority involvement or reaching senior level classes in her program of study. She stated,

I'll be honest; I'm not going to say it's put a damper on my academic life because my GPA hasn't really dropped. I mean, it has a little bit, but I'm not sure if that's because I'm in a sorority now or if it's because I'm getting older and my classes are getting harder...But, then again, like the activities that go on, like other Greek events, our events, it kind of prohibits me from studying as much as maybe I should.

*Participation in Social Activities*

Three participants said that their respective sorority served as a major social outlet. One participant described the social aspect of her experience as, "I've never had as many social obligations before in my life [until I became a member.] It definitely keeps me jumping and always meeting new people, being in front of a crowd, things like that." The participants indicated that the social activities involved mainly attending other Greek functions such as parties and step shows. One participant said that after the chapter business was handled, the chapter members would attend numerous social events. She stated

...We were out there at every party doing stuff. We had our chapter meetings and we really went to a lot of parties. It was just what we did. We were road tripping like every weekend. Some weekends, we would go to one school on Friday and another school on Saturday.

One participant was unsure of exactly how she felt with regards to the social aspects of being a member of her sorority. She felt that she has received a great deal of attention since becoming a member of her organization. She stated,

Socially, I mean it's like, everybody's in your face now. Everybody's watching you. It's like a glass, fish bowl—you're swimming around for everybody to watch. And, you have to watch every move you make. There [are] a lot of fake people in your life. You know, people speak to you out in public, but then you know that they talk about you later. So, it's just like—I have mixed feelings about the social aspect of it.

*Professional Preparation*

Three participants described that their sorority involvement has helped them prepare for their careers and post-baccalaureate life. Participants indicated that they have professionally benefited from their sorority involvement in that they have learned and adhered to proper business protocol and etiquette that they have utilized in their careers. One participant stated that her sorority involvement has helped her develop business, leadership, and life skills that will be useful when she enters the workforce. Another participant described how the sorority is conducted in the same fashion as a business and, thus, her membership has helped prepare her for her career. One participant described how although she had been involved in other organizations, her sorority involvement afforded her hands-on experience that helped her career.

[Once I joined,] I understood more, like the business aspect of it. As far as running a meeting, sending out a newsletter, doing an event, I mean, stuff like that. I had been involved with stuff like that [before], but just the actual [doing] you know, like the policies and procedures and having to adhere to those, the proper way to run a meeting and stuff like that. I mean, that was kind of new to me.

This participant also described that being in a sorority should entail a great deal of networking among members. She described how members should have an awareness of what members are involved or affiliated with outside of the sorority. She stated, "I think networking should play a larger part [than what it does.] I always make a point to know what people do, where they work, and I really [have] made some connections that way. People don't utilize [networking] enough."



*Other Emergent Themes*

Three additional themes emerged that were not a part of the research questions but did relate to study participants and their experiences as White women in historically Black sororities in the Midwest but. These themes are 1) familial support; 2) welcoming of or exposure to cross-cultural environments; and 3) incidents of intolerance and intimidation. The author of this study has included these themes in this section because of their significance. Each additional emergent theme is expanded below.

*Familial Support*

Three of the four participants stated that their families had been supportive throughout their lives. One participant described that although she did not have the best relationship with the members of her immediate family as she grew up, she has since developed solid relationships with all of them. This participant stated how happy her mother was for her when she was accepted for membership into the sorority. She stated, "When I got [into the sorority], [my mother] was so proud of me because I stuck with it and I didn't let one little downfall determine how I was going to [spend]...the rest of the time I was here." Another participant described how her parents had a deep presence in her life because her mother was a stay-at-home mom and her father was a college professor and did his research and writing during the evening time. This participant described her upbringing as "pretty stable" with both of her parents being present a great deal. Another participant described that her parents have been supportive of all she had done in her life. She attributes her position in life to the support she received from her parents.



I remember my parents were always very supportive of what I did and, especially now that I'm an adult, I have a great appreciation for what they did. They were stricter [than other parents]; you know I had an earlier curfew than anybody else and I couldn't be on the phone after nine o'clock and that kind of stuff. Of course I hated it then. But now, I'm thirty years old. Okay, true enough, I'm not married, but also I don't have any kids, I've got a college education, [and] I've never abused drugs or alcohol or anything like that. So it's like, yeah, I think they did a pretty good job.

*Welcoming of or Exposure to Cross-cultural Experiences*

People aware of the limitations of their environments may make conscious decisions to change their environments to change or improve their life experiences. Three participants were either reared in or exposed to cross-cultural environments. The one participant who was not reared in a racially diverse environment described her hometown as a "very small, very redneck, White oriented...it's nothing for my uncles to pop out [with] racists jokes." This participant rebelled against the environment where she grew up and sought out a racially and ethnically diverse environment once she entered college. This participant described her college circle of friends as very "diverse." She stated,

I had a very diverse group of friends. We had a clique of seven tight. In the group, [excluding me] there were three African-Americans, two Caucasians, and one Asian-American. We went everywhere together, we did everything together—we went to White fraternity parties, Black fraternity parties. You

know, [we] knew everybody, hung out, went to the cafe[teria], you know, that whole thing.

Another participant was reared in a very large metropolitan area. This participant attended public school for her entire pre-college education and has always been in a racially and ethnically diverse environment. She stated, "Growing up, I had a diverse group of friends. So, it really wasn't anything new to me as far as sometimes being the only Caucasian person in the group or one of few...that didn't really faze me." Another participant lived outside of the United States for three years. This participant described how her family relocated from a diverse town to a less diverse town and how much she disliked the less diverse environment. She stated,

And I went to a school that was like, all White. And I hated it. I hated it because everybody was so close-minded and never experienced any real aspects of life. And then when I came [to college], it was much better.

Another participant described how her parents' instilled the importance of embracing diversity because they both came from backgrounds that were not welcoming of other races and ethnicities. She stated,

[My parents] got married young and went out east and kind of revolted [against the background from where they came.] I mean, they had a lot of African-American friends. [They had] tons of African-American friends, tons of international friends, like East Indian, Asian, and a lot of that had to do with where they lived. My dad was going through graduate school and he made a lot of international friends. So my memories of my parents' best friends are that most of them were not White. They were of some other ethnicity... my parents

are very liberal and very open-minded politically and socially, um, almost borderline hippie. So my home was very open and liberal in that way. And I just always remember, if you met somebody different [or] if someone talked different or looked different or whatever, it was always, "Oh how interesting. Oh I'd loved to talk to them more,"—that was always the response my parents had. And, therefore, that was the response they taught us as opposed to, "Oh they're different, they're weird. Or oh they're different, they're scary or oh they're different, they're not to be messed with or interacted with or whatever."

#### *Incidents of Intolerance and Intimidation*

Three of the four participants described incidents where they perceived themselves or other White people to have been treated differently because of their Whiteness. These incidents were defined as incidents of intolerance and intimidation for the present study. One participant described how she and another White member, who had earned a prestigious award, had been repeatedly mistaken for each other during a sorority conference. She stated,

At a [sorority meeting], [another White member] won [a prestigious sorority award]—people congratulated me all day long for [having won the award.]

People were saying congratulations, and I'm like, "Okay, thanks," [but] what are they congratulating me for? And then it hit me—they thought I was her. I was like, okay. And [that evening], [a national executive board member] came to me and said, "Oh, congratulations, our [prestigious award winner]." I just kind of look [and] I said, "No, soror, I'm the, you know, that's not me." And, she said, "Oh, you're the other White girl." And I just looked at her. And [an executive

board member said to her], “Soror, this is the [executive board position I hold].”

And she was like, “Oh.” I mean she was just kind of like [taken aback]. I was just like okay. Oh, my, I was mad. What can you say? And she’s called me

White girl a couple of other times. I mean, I find it disrespectful.

Although the participant was upset by the incident and found it disrespectful, she felt as if there was little recourse because of the officer’s position in the sorority hierarchy.

Another participant said that there was another White woman interested in pursuing membership with her chapter, but some chapter members do not want another White woman in the chapter. She stated,

I do know, and, I wouldn’t—it does bother me, but, there’s another White girl who was interested, has been interested for quite some time, is definitely showing [interest in the organization.] [She has] done everything, you know, she wants to do, and, it has been said that we don’t need another one. We have one already. You know, but that’s also coming from the younger [newer members in the chapter] who don’t know any better. [To me] it’s like, how are you going to limit yourself? I don’t really understand that. Of course, it makes me feel bad.

This participant had an awareness of the fact that although she was the minority within the chapter, her fellow chapter member’s lack of tolerance was unacceptable.

### Summary of Results

The author of this study was able to obtain a considerable amount of rich descriptive data from the four study participants in relation to the four research questions. Four themes emerged as factors that influenced the decision of White

women to join predominately Black sororities: 1) perceived quality of sisterhood in the chapter; 2) perceived diversity among members within the chapter, 3) internal and external influences; 4) perceived common value system with the organization, and 5) aversion to NPC sororities.

The focus of research question two was to identify any perceived barriers that existed for White women's participation in historically Black sororities. The participants in this study did not perceive many barriers for their participation in their respective sororities. Two themes emerged as perceived barriers that exist for White women's participation in historically Black sororities: 1) membership questioned from outside the chapter and 2) feeling the need to prove oneself.

The third research question focused on how the study participants described their experience of being White members of historically Black sororities. The participants in this study described their experiences with mixed sentiments. In answering this question, three themes emerged: 1) life within the sorority; 2) level of involvement; and 3) being perceived as the most dependable.

The focus of the fourth research question was to determine what role historically Black sororities played in the academic, social, and professional lives of their White members. All participants indicated that their sorority involvement had an impact on their academic, social, and professional lives. Three themes emerged from the roles historically Black sororities play in the academic, social, and professional lives of their White members: 1) importance of scholastic attainment; 2) participation in social activities; and 3) professional preparation.

Three additional themes emerged that were not a part of the research questions but were included because of their significance to the study. These three additional themes were: 1) familial support; 2) welcoming of or exposure to cross-cultural experiences; and 3) incidents of intolerance and intimidation.

## CHAPTER V

## DISCUSSION

The study was designed to identify factors that influence White women's participation in historically Black sororities at predominately White institutions in the Midwest. A secondary goal of the present study was to understand the study participants' experiences in their respective sororities. This section will include a discussion of the results in comparison to the literature review followed by limitations and recommendations.

Significance of Results

It is difficult to determine with great certainty why people choose or do not choose to join or partake in any activity because the reasons are as diverse as the people who join. Beckman, Bitsoff, Heinemen, and Scott (n.d.) asserted that people join groups for many reasons, but most frequently these reasons involve some type of psychological security and protection. The present study's scope was not to determine why the study participants chose not to join NPC sororities. In fact, the researcher did not refer to NPC sororities at all during data collection. However, all participants consistently referred to specific aspects of NPC sorority life that they found to be negative for membership in NPC sororities but positive for membership in NPHC sororities. The NPC characteristics that participants found to be objectionable were consistent with the characteristics Berkowitz and Padavic (1999) found to be functional and organizational differences between NPC and NPHC sororities. In their study, Berkowitz and Padavic (1999) concluded that the NPC sorority membership was very much phase oriented and limited to one's college years, with great focus given to



“getting a man” and social activities. On the other hand, NPHC sororities in the Berkowitz and Padavic (1999) study had greater focus on participating in community service activities, professional development, less focus on dating relationships, and lifetime membership commitments. The present study participants, like the NPHC sorority members in the Berkowitz and Padavic (1999) study, also viewed their sorority memberships as life-long commitments. In fact, one study participant had aspirations of attaining state leadership positions within her sorority. One conclusion that could be drawn from the results is what one needs and desires from sorority membership would determine whether or not one would pursue membership in a particular organization.

All participants described the perceived quality of sisterhood among chapter members as intense and real, not a just term that was “tossed around” during recruitment. This intensity of the relationships could be a result of the actual number of Black students at the particular predominately White institutions. As Taylor (2003) noted, Black students who attend PWIs have a tendency to become more aware of themselves and who they are as people. In addition, there is a sense of appreciation and a bond that forms with other African-American students at PWIs due to the lack of diversity, specifically the lack of other African-Americans. This bond forms primarily because of the small numbers of Black students at PWIs with which to identify and validate oneself (Epps, 1971). A student of color attending a PWI has a sense of shared understanding with the other students of color at the same PWI. The researcher would argue that Epps’ concept of bond and appreciation among minority groups would become even more intensified within a minority organization at a PWI. Minority groups, such as NPHC sorority chapters, become a sub-group of the greater minority

group. It can be concluded that this bond, or sisterhood in the case of sororities, was also a result of the women in the NPHC chapters not only sharing the common bond of being Black college women, but also sharing the common bond of being members of the same sorority chapter.

Although the study participants depicted their sorority life experience with positive regard, each subject described their experience as having some negative aspects as well. One could infer this contradiction to the structure and basic functioning of any group. In lay terms, this contradiction could be the result of the "ups-and-downs" of the functioning of the group. Conclusions drawn include that the contradiction existed because of the intense structure and level of the relationships that develop among Black Greek organizations. Black Greek chapters sheltered within PWIs usually have small membership numbers and, thus, sometimes the members of these chapters become so fused and enmeshed with the chapter that conflict develops. As one participant stated, "the sorority becomes your life."

No literature exists on level of attainment among White women in Black sororities. Interestingly, in this study, all four participants held at least one executive position within the chapter; two participants had the opportunity to hold two different executive positions during their experiences. In addition to executive board responsibilities, all participants assisted with various chapter programming. Although not directly related, Case (1996) found that homosexual men in college fraternities often attained executive positions and had a "tendency toward 'overachievement' [that] may reflect a desire for validation and acceptance by the group" (p. 2). White women in Black sororities, like gay men in fraternities, are a minority group. However, White

women in Black sororities at PWIs are a minority within a minority (the Black sorority) within a minority (Black students.) The participants described their sorority experience in terms of their level of involvement with their chapter as well as being perceived as dependable among chapter members. Although participants indicated that they chose to be highly involved members, they did not indicate whether or not the role of dependability was self-imposed or imposed on them by the chapter. The White women in the present study could not “just” be members. In order for the White women in the present study to rise in their respective sororities, they had to be “better than” an average member. In fact, they had to be “super” members. The process by which White women in Black sororities rise is similar to the way Black people rise in White organizations—both are minorities trying to succeed in a situation where they are not a part of the dominant group (Cobbs & Turnock, 2003). This need to overachieve could have resulted from the desire to be accepted by the chapter members, coupled with the minority status of study participants. The need to overachieve could also have been a result of the participants’ feeling the need to prove themselves, a result of their membership being questioned from those outside of their chapters.

Participants described that their sorority involvement has helped them prepare for their careers and post-baccalaureate life and, as such, was consistent with the findings of Berkowitz and Padavic (1999). The participants of the present study indicated that their sorority involvement helped prepare them for life after graduation in that they have acquired business, life, and leadership skills. The participants indicated that they have benefited professionally by having hands-on opportunities to experience the planning and coordination of events, learn proper business etiquette, and conducting

the chapter in a business-like fashion. Participants also indicated that networking played a role in their professional development, similar to the findings of Berkowitz and Padavic (1999) and Schuh, et al. (1992). Sorority involvement aids members professionally in that they learn how to successfully work with people, fellow members and non-members alike, who had different ideas, experiences, and backgrounds. This skill set is highly crucial and instrumental to one's professional career and life post-baccalaureate studies.

Three participants were either reared in or exposed to cross-cultural environments. The participant who was not reared in a racially diverse environment welcomed such an environment once she entered college. Participants' parents embraced diversity and instilled the value of appreciating people of different backgrounds, cultures, and experiences than one's own. This exposure to other races and cultures at an early age is an important factor. The researcher believed that this life-long exposure other races and cultures helped mold the participants' perspectives toward people of color. People of color had been instrumental part of participants' lives (for example, close family members; fellow church members, etc.) Because of this life-long exposure, the participants were able to have a certain sense of comfort and ease around people of color. Thus, being the only White member of a Black sorority chapter could have been perceived as not a major concern of the study participants.

Three of the four participants described incidents where they perceived themselves or other White people to have been treated differently because of their Whiteness. This finding is reversely consistent with Thompson's (2002) study where it was concluded that students of color felt intimidated by or uncomfortable with

predominately White sororities. These incidents were defined as incidents of intolerance and intimidation for the present study. The present research's incidents of intolerance and intimidation were very similar to Solorzano & Yosso's (2000) "microaggressions." Solorzano & Yosso (2000) defined microaggressions as "subtle insults (verbal, nonverbal, and/or visual) directed toward people of color, often automatically or unconsciously" (p. 6). Some actions toward study participants were clearly racially motivated, if not racist. It appeared as if some people of color felt as if "the inner circle" had been penetrated when these "White girls" joined one of "their" organizations. In some instances, some women in the study appeared to have been treated as faceless beings without any thoughts, feelings, or emotions. Although study participants did not outright say they had been victims of racism, the situations they were subjected to could easily be considered to be racist.

It appeared as if the study participants either downplayed or disregarded the incidents of intolerance and intimidation. This downplay could have existed because of the admiration and respect participants had for their respective chapters and organizations, as well as the participants focusing on the positive aspects of their membership. Historically Black fraternities and sororities have never had restricted membership based upon race. One could infer that because BGLOs never restricted membership to only Black people, they would be welcoming of all races. However, one must keep in mind one of the major reasons why Black fraternities and sororities were founded was due to the history of racially exclusive practices of historically White fraternities and sororities. The author believed that because of this history, some African-Americans and members of BGLOs, more than likely the perpetrators of the

incidents of intolerance and intimidation, feel that White people do not have a place on their membership rosters.

Although none of the participants said outright that they had been victims of hazing, all participants made references to hazing or, at a minimum, a pledging process beyond the standard MIP. Beckman, et al. (n.d.) defined hazing as physical or mental harassment, abuse, or humiliation by way of initiation. The National Pan-Hellenic Council, Incorporated (n.d.) defined hazing as:

Any action taken or situation created that involves or results in abusive, physical contact or mutual harassment of a prospective Fraternity or Sorority member; and that any such action is considered hazing, whether it occurs on or off the Fraternity or Sorority premises, campus or place where chapters or prospective members meet and that hazing has also been described to include any action that results in excessive mutual or physical discomfort, embarrassment or harassment; that such activities include, but are not limited to paddling, creation of excessive fatigue, physical or psychological shock, morally degrading or humiliating activities, late work sessions that interfere with scholastic activities and any other activities inconsistent with fraternal law and regulations and policies of the affiliated educational institution and federal, state or local law.

Beckman et al. (n.d.) argued that although hazing is not an enjoyable experience by far, people will endure it in order to become part of a group. Therefore, Beckman et al. (n.d.) argued that group membership implies something greater than the act of hazing and, therefore, the positive aspects outweigh the negative aspects when pursuing group membership. People join groups for recognition and status, power, and for what cannot



be achieved individually. One participant described sorority membership as “prestigious.” Hazing can occur in a variety of environments such as high schools, orchestras or bands, athletic teams, the military, college Greek organizations, and even in the workplace (Nuwer, 1999). Beckman, et al. (n.d.) noted,

Although hazing has been prevalent throughout the years, it is poorly understood. This is partly due to the secretive nature that often accompanies rookie situations, especially within fraternities. Thus, it has been difficult for researchers to understand the underlying mechanisms that perpetuate hazing.

Study participants used terms and phrases such as “sands,” “big sister,” “DP”, “being on line”, “being the rock”, “crossing”, “coming out”, and “having a line name or number”—all of which connote hazing activities occurred within their respective sororities. In sweetness and light, the results strongly indicate that all participants had been subjected to hazing in order to gain membership into their respective chapters. All of the White women in the present study went through the same hazing rituals and rites of passage as did the other members of their membership intake class. The author of the present study is hardly an advocate for hazing or pledging in any form. Although all study participants had been subjected to some form of hazing, they still did not ‘earn’ the same respect and admiration other NPHC sorority members attained after having gone through similar processes. It would appear as if no matter how hard White women worked before and after joining historically Black sororities, it will never be possible for some people of color to think of them as more than “paper members” whether these White women endured traditional hazing rituals or not. Paper members in the vernacular of NPHC groups refers to individuals who were initiated following



formal MIP standards supported by the national leadership, but did not experience the traditional hazing rituals that occurred in pledging programs, “lines” prior to 1990. In some experiences, a White woman member who had endured traditional hazing rituals could be subjected to greater ridicule than a Black “paper” member. No matter the level of involvement or dedication, White women members within historically Black sororities always have their membership questioned, covertly or overtly, simply because they are White.

### Limitations and Recommendations

The present study was the first to examine the experiences of White women in historically Black sororities at predominantly White institutions in the Midwest. This study could be replicated with a variety of modifications as suggested below. The following recommendations were directed to researchers and Student Affairs professionals.

1. The present study did not examine the participants’ level of White identity development to determine if there is a correlation between participants’ levels of White identity development as a factor that promotes or hinders one’s desire for inclusion in Black sororities. Also, future research could examine whether membership in historically Black sororities accelerates or retards White women’s level of White identity development.
3. The present study briefly addressed study participants’ family structure. Future research could examine how White women’s memberships in historically Black sororities affect their degree of attachment with their families. Future studies could also include the participants’ family members’ perspective about their relative’s decision.

4. The present study examined participants' involvement during undergraduate studies. Future research could be conducted longitudinally that examines the participants' quality of involvement in their sororities across time.
5. A cross-sectional study of NPHC organizations could be conducted to identify the non-Black membership over a period of time in order to identify whether the percentage of White membership in NPHC organizations has changed across time.
6. The present study examined White membership in historically Black sororities from the White members' perspective. Future research could examine the Black members' perspective in order to examine attitudes and perspectives toward White membership.
7. The present study examined White membership in historically Black sororities from the White members' perspective. Future studies could examine White membership in NPHC organizations from NIC and NPC perspectives.
8. The present study was conducted in the Midwest. Future studies should include White women in NPHC sororities who attend college in other geographical regions to determine if similarities exist. In particular, future research could investigate whether or not the experiences of White women in NPHC sororities attending HBCUs would be different from White women in NPHC sororities attending PWIs.
9. The present study examined White NPHC sorority members from different national sororities. Future researchers could conduct a comparative study of the attitudes and perspectives of chapters from the same national organization that do and do not have White members.
10. The present study examined White NPHC sorority members. Future research could examine other minority membership (i.e. Asian, Latino) in NPHC organizations.

11. The present study examined White membership in NPHC sororities. Future studies could be replicated utilizing NPHC fraternities.

12. Student Affairs professionals must go above and beyond in support of students who 'step beyond color boundaries' and partake in co-curricular activities where they are the sole representatives of their race or ethnicity within the organization. This support is so important to the students' success because the students may be subjected to criticism or "microaggressions" (Solorzano & Yosso, 2000). from people outside of their race, but also from within their racial group.

13. Student Affairs professionals should encourage and facilitate collaboration between the NPHC, NPC, and NIC member organizations on their campuses so that the different chapters have awareness and knowledge of the campus' entire community instead of a particular sect.

14. Student Affairs professionals should consider the deferment of Greek recruitment until spring quarters/semesters so that potential members have enough time to adjust to the college environment. Also, by deferring Greek recruitment to the spring, potential members may be able to experience and observe the different Greek organizations on campus before committing to a particular organization without little or no knowledge or awareness of the chapter.

### Conclusions

The study was designed to identify factors that influence White women's participation in historically Black sororities at predominately White institutions in the Midwest. A secondary goal of the present study was to understand the study participants' experiences in their respective sororities. Data were collected by means of

audio taping four individual structured interviews. In order to insure consistency, an interview guide protocol (Appendix B) was developed and utilized during each interview. Because this research area has gone unaddressed, very little scholarly literature exists in regards to this topic.

Several themes emerged as factors that influenced the decision of White women to join historically Black sororities. The present study's scope was not to determine why the study participants chose not to join NPC sororities, however, all participants consistently referred to specific aspects of NPC sorority life that they found to be negative for membership in NPC sororities but positive for membership in NPHC sororities. All participants described the perceived quality of sisterhood among chapter members as intense and real, not just a term that was 'tossed around' during recruitment. The intensity of the relationships could be a result of the actual number of Black students at the particular predominately White institutions. Although the study participants depicted their sorority life experience with positive regard, each subject also described their experience as having some negative aspects. One conclusion that could be drawn was that the contradiction existed because of the intense structure and level of the relationships that develop among Black Greek organizations. Because of participants' life-long exposure to cross-cultural environments, the participants were able to have a certain sense of comfort and ease around people of color. Thus, being the only White member of a Black sorority chapter could have been perceived as not a major concern of the study participants. It appeared as if the study participants either downplayed or disregarded the incidents of intolerance and intimidation. In some instances, some women in the study appeared to have been treated as faceless beings

without any thoughts, feelings, or emotions. Although study participants did not outright say they had been victims of racism, the situations that they have been subjected to could easily be considered to be racist. Although none of the participants said outright that they had been victims of hazing, all participants made references to hazing or, at a minimum, a pledging process beyond the standard MIP. However, it was noted that although all study participants had been subjected to some form of hazing, they still did not 'earn' the same respect and admiration other NPHC sorority members attained after having gone through similar processes. No matter the level of involvement or dedication, White women members within historically Black sororities will always have their membership questioned, covertly or overtly, simply because they are White. It is obvious that existing chapter members believed in and saw the potential of the study participants; otherwise they would not have been offered membership into their respective sororities. The fact of the matter is that all four study participants were devoted, sincere members of their respective organizations. It is truly unfortunate that some people were not able to look beyond the study participants' skin color and see them for the members they really were. Racial and ethnic diversity are areas that must be addressed among the Greek community (Manley, 1990; Boschini, 1998). If Greek organizations are to remain relevant in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, then the content of a member's character must become more important than skin color (King, 1963).

## REFERENCES

- A call for values congruence. (2003, March 21). *College Greek Community Task Force*, 1.
- Berkowitz, A. & Padavic, I. (1999). Getting a man or getting ahead: A comparison of white and black sororities. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 27(4).
- Binder, R., Seiler, M. B., Schaub, W., & Lake, T. (2002, December). *Greek academic achievement update: Gamma Sigma Alpha & Bowling Green State University partnership*. Paper presented at the 2002 annual meeting of the Association of Fraternity Advisors, Columbus, Ohio.
- Black Greek fraternities in the '90s: Are they still culturally relevant? (1993). *EbonyMan*, 8, 44.
- Bogdan, R., & Biklen, S. K. (1992). *Qualitative research for education* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon, Inc.
- Boschini, V., & Thompson, C. (1998). The future of the Greek experience: Greeks and diversity. In E. G. Whipple (Ed.), *New Directions for Student Services*, 81, (pp. 19-27). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Bryan, W. A. (1987). Contemporary fraternity and sorority issues. In R. B. Winston Jr., W. R. Nettles III, & J. H. Oppen, Jr. (Eds.), *New Directions for Student Services: Vol. 40. Fraternities and sororities on the contemporary college campus* (pp. 37-56). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Case, D. N. (1996). A glimpse of the invisible membership: A national survey of lesbian Greek members. *Perspectives*, 23, 5-8.



- Cobbs, P. M., & Turnock, J. L. (2003). *Cracking the corporate code: The revealing success stories of 32 African-American executives*. New York: Amacom.
- Cole, L. (1936). *Psychology of Adolescence (Chapter IV)*. Farrar and Rinehart: New York.
- Daniel, J. H. (1976). A study of Black sororities at a university with marginal integration. *Journal of Non-White concerns in personal guidance*, 4, 191-201.
- Emert, D. J. (1940). *Factors in the personality and environment of the college woman related to her participation in extra-curricular activities*. (Master thesis-typewritten). Syracuse University: Syracuse, NY.
- Epps, E. A. (1971). *Black students in White schools*. Worthington, OH: Charles A. Jones Publishing Company.
- Foley, J. A., & Foley, R. K. (1969). *The college scene: Students tell it like it is*. New York: Cowles Book Company, Inc.
- King, M. L. (1963). *I have dream*. Retrieved August 1, 2003 from [http://www.stanford.edu/group/King/publications/speeches/address\\_at\\_march\\_on\\_washington.pdf](http://www.stanford.edu/group/King/publications/speeches/address_at_march_on_washington.pdf)
- Kunjufu, J. (1997). *Black college student survival guide*. Chicago: African American Images.
- Lee, A. M. (1955). *Fraternities without brotherhood: A study of prejudice on the American campus*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Lord, M. G. (1987). Frats and sororities: The Greek rites of exclusion. *The Nation*, 1, 245, 10.
- Manley, R. E. (1990). Fraternities' future holds ethnic diversity. *Fraternal Law*, 31.



- McKee, C. W. (1987). Understanding the diversity of the Greek world. In R. B. Winston, Jr., W. R. Nettles III, and J. H. Oppen, Jr. (Eds.). In R. B. Winston Jr., W. R. Nettles III, & J. H. Oppen Jr. (Eds.), *New Directions for Student Services: Vol. 40. Fraternities and sororities on the contemporary college campus* (p. 21). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- McKenzie, A. (1990). Community service and social action: Using the past to guide the future of Black Greek-letter fraternities. *NASPA Journal*, 28(1), 30-36.
- McMillan, J. H., & Schumacher, S. (2001). *Research in education: A conceptual introduction* (5<sup>th</sup> ed.). New York: Addison Wesley Longman.
- Merriam, S. B. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Merton, R. K., Fiske, M., & Kendall, P. L. (1990). *The focused interview: A manual of problems and procedures* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). New York: The Free Press.
- Miller, L. D. (1973). Distinctive characteristics of fraternity members. *Journal of College Student Personnel*, 14, 126-129.
- National Pan-Hellenic Council, Inc. (n.d.) *NPHC History*. Retrieved September 19, 2002 from <http://www.nphchq.org/about/history.htm>
- Newcomb, T. M., & Wilson, E. K. (Eds.). (1966). *College peer groups*. Chicago: Aldine.
- Owen, K. C. (1991). Reflections on the college fraternity and its changing nature. In J. L. Anson and R. F. Marchesani (Eds.), *Baird's manual of American college fraternities* (20<sup>th</sup> ed.). (pp. 1-24). Indianapolis, IN: Baird's Manual Foundation.

- Patton, M. Q. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.
- Nuwer, H. (1999). *Wrongs of passage: Fraternities, sororities, hazing and binge drinking*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Pascarella, E. T., & Terenzini, P. T. (1991). *How college affects students: Findings and insights from twenty years of research*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Pascarella, E. T., Whitt, E. J., Nora, A., Edison, M., Hagedorn, L. S., & Terenzini, P. T. (1995). *What have we learned from the first year of the national study of student learning?* Chicago: University of Illinois, College of Education.
- Schuh, J. H., Triponey, V. L. Heim, L. L., & Nishimura, K. (1992). Student involvement in historically Black Greek letter organizations. *NASPA Journal*, 29(4), 274-282.
- Sedlacek, W. E. (1987). Black students on white campuses: Twenty years of research. *Journal of College Student Personnel*, 28, 519-523.
- Solorzano, D., & Yosso, T. (2000). Critical race theory, racial microaggressions, and campus racial climate: The experiences of African American college students. *Journal of Negro Education*, 69(1/2), 60-73.
- Stains, L. A. (1994). Black like me. *Rolling Stone*, 678, 69.
- Steed, C. E. (1944). *Rise of extra curricular activities as a college campus phenomenon and tracing of initial motivation through eight case studies*. (Master thesis-typewritten). Syracuse University: Syracuse, NY.

- Taylor, J. L. (2003). *A qualitative analysis of the affective experiences of African American males at predominantly black and white institutions*. Unpublished master's thesis, Eastern Illinois University, Charleston, Illinois.
- Thomas, J. (1998, September 8). At state U., no room at the dorm for the invited but not expected. *New York Times*, A1, A18.
- Thompson, C. D. (2000). Factors that influence minority student participation in predominately white fraternities and sororities (Doctoral dissertation, Northern Arizona University, 2000). *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 61(10A), 3923.
- Tucker, A.C. (1983). Greek life and the minority student: A perspective. In W.A. Bryan and R.A. Schwartz (Eds.). *The Eighties: Challenges for Fraternities and Sororities*. Alexandria, VA: American College Personnel Association.
- Wallace, J. A. (1993). The collegiate experiences of black students attending a historically and predominantly white university in Texas. (Doctoral Dissertation, Texas A&M University, 1993). *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 54(05A), 1630.
- Weidman, J. C., Twale, D. J., & Stein, E. L. (2001). *Socialization of graduate and professional students in higher education: A perilous passage*. New York: Jossey-Bass.
- Whipple, E. G., Baier, J. L., & Grady, D. L. (1991). A comparison of Black and White Greeks at a predominantly white university. *NASPA Journal*, 28, 140-148.
- Winston, R. B., Jr., Nettles, W. R. III, & Opper, J. H., Jr. (Eds.). (1987). *New Directions for Student Services: Vol. 40. Fraternities and sororities on the contemporary college campus*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

## APPENDIXES

### Appendix A Informed Consent Form

and the experiences of the white members of historically black sororities. This information will also help to improve our understanding of the college in general.

and you will be interviewed and audio taped. Any questions from your part will be asked without obligation. The information collected from the interview will be utilized in the thesis, which will be a written analysis of the experience of white women in historically black sororities. All information obtained during this study will be kept confidential and confidential. Participation in this study is voluntary. You may decide to participate or withdraw from study at any time without any further obligation.

At the end of the study, a copy of the thesis will be available via the Internet at [www.hawaii.edu](http://www.hawaii.edu). I thank you in advance for time and participation. If you have further questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

#### Appendix A Informed Consent Form

## PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT FORM

As a part of my program of study I am completing a thesis tentatively entitled, "White women in historically Black sororities: A qualitative exploration." This study was designed to identify the factors that influence White women's participation in historically Black sororities at predominantly White institutions, as well as to gain an understanding of the study participants' experiences in their respective sororities. For the thesis, I will be conducting interviews—this is where you come into the formula.

Your participation in this study may help higher education faculty and administrators better understand the experiences of the White members of historically Black sororities. Your participation will also help to improve our understanding of the college environment in general.

As a participant, you will be interviewed and audio taped. Any quotations from your interview will be used without attribution. The information collected from the interviews will be utilized in the thesis, which will be a written analysis of the experiences you share with me. All information obtained during this study will be kept in the strictest of confidence and stored securely. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may decline to participate or withdraw from study at any time without any further obligation.

At the conclusion of the study, a copy of the thesis will be available via the Internet at <http://www.marylbankhead.com> I thank you in advance for time and participation. If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

---

 Participant Informed Consent Form

By initialing and signing below, I agree to:

(Please initial)

- \_\_\_\_\_ (a) participate in this research study voluntarily;
- \_\_\_\_\_ (b) agree to allow quotations without attributions;
- \_\_\_\_\_ (c) reserve the right to withdraw from the study at any time;
- \_\_\_\_\_ (d) grant permission for the audiotape recording of my interview

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant (Printed)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant (Signature)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Mary L. Bankhead  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher (Printed)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher (Signature)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## INTERVIEW GUIDE PROTOCOL

*White women in Black sororities at predominantly White universities in the Midwest*

Mary L. Rankin

*Introduction:* I will introduce the topic and explain the purpose of the interview. I will invite the participant to tell her story. The following questions will only serve to assure that questions get answered as the conversation proceeds.

Let's start by getting an understanding of who you are.

Tell me about yourself. How would you describe yourself to others?

What was it like growing up in your hometown?

Describe your family life.

Give me a brief overview of who you were before college?

How involved were you on campus socially?

Were you involved in any other organizations?

How would you have defined yourself prior to joining the sorority?

What did you know about sororities before joining?

What interested in you sorority life?

Is there anything that set your sorority apart from other sororities on your campus?

## Appendix B Interview Guide Protocol



## INTERVIEW GUIDE PROTOCOL

White women in historically Black sororities at predominately White institutions in the Midwest

Mary L. Bankhead

Introduction: I will introduce the topic and explain the purpose of the interview. I will invite the participant to tell her story. The following questions will only serve to assure that my questions get answered as the conversation proceeds.

### **Let's start by getting an understanding of who you are.**

Tell me about yourself. How would you describe yourself to others?

What was it like growing up in your hometown?

Describe your family life.

Give me a brief overview of who you were before college?

How involved were you on campus academically and socially?

Were you involved in any other clubs/organizations?

How would you have defined yourself prior to joining the sorority?

What did you know about sororities before joining?

What interested in you sorority life?

Is there anything that set your sorority apart from other sororities on your campus?

What were your reasons for joining a historically black sorority?

Tell me about the atmosphere of the sorority as you heard/saw/experienced it before you joined?

In what ways did your perception change, if any, after you joined?

### **Now let's talk about your sorority experience.**

How large is/was your current chapter/undergraduate chapter?

How involved are/were you in the sorority?

Do/Did you hold an executive position?

Do you attend any regional or national meeting/conventions of the sorority? If so, how often? Describe how you felt at these meetings? What was your level of comfort?

In what ways does/did your level of involvement affect your sorority experience?

What is/was life in the chapter like?

What role does/did the sorority play in your academic, social, and professional life?

How would you define sisterhood?

How strong of a connection do/did you feel with your sorors?

Among the sorority, where do/did you fit in? What was your role?

### **Now let's talk about the role race and ethnicity plays in your sorority.**

Prior to joining your sorority, can you describe the views/opinions the members had towards your potential membership in the sorority?

Are there other Caucasian members in your chapter and organization as a whole? If so, what is your level of interaction with them?

Describe the reaction of your sorors when you are meeting/being introduced initially/for the first time.

When you joined your chapter, describe the reaction of the alumnae members of your chapter?

What is it like for you to be a white member of a historically Black sorority?

Do any the barriers exist for White members in your sorority? If so, can you describe them?

In what ways has your membership in a Black sorority influenced your perception of racism in America?

What advice would you give to another White woman who is thinking about joining a Black sorority?

What is your viewpoint on paraphernalia as in clothing, artwork, etc for your sorority?

Is there anything else you would like to add?

Is there anything else you feel I should address for my study?

Thank you.

**Appendix C**  
**Call for Information Email**

CALL FOR INFORMATION EMAIL

The following is the email that I sent to six different fraternity/sorority email list serves to which I subscribe.

Hello,

My name is Mary Bankhead. I am currently pursuing my M.S. in College Student Affairs at Eastern Illinois University in Charleston, Illinois. As a part of my program, we have the option of completing a comprehensive exam or writing a thesis. I have elected to write a thesis.

My thesis is tentatively titled, "Whites in Historically Black Fraternities and Sororities." My study will be a qualitative study. I am planning on interviewing 4-6 white members of BGLOs. I am at the beginning stage of researching for the review of literature. This is where I need your help.

Virtually no research has been done in this area, or at least nothing I can find outside of the two articles written in Ebony and Rolling Stone magazines. Although the two articles provide relatively good information, they are lacking as far as actual research and data collection are concerned. I am asking if anyone knows of any journals, articles, research, theories, etc. that could possibly help me. I am also asking if anyone has any insight in this specific area or any suggestions that could be of assistance to me as I begin my research. If so, please email them to me. You can send responses to [masterthesisresponses@hotmail.com](mailto:masterthesisresponses@hotmail.com) or reply to this email. Any assistance would be greatly appreciated. I thank you for your assistance in advance.

Sincerely,

Mary L. Bankhead  
M.S. College Student Affairs, Candidate  
Eastern Illinois University

Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority, Inc.  
Beta Beta Fall 1999; transferring to Alpha Sigma Graduate Chapter

P.S. This letter will be sent to Sigma Gamma Rho, NPHC, and fraternal news list serves.